

CATALYZING EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP: FRESH
EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH IN POST
CHRISTENDOM NORTH GEORGIA

Heather M. Jallad

Bachelor of Arts, University of South Florida, 1990
MDiv, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2010

Mentor

Michael Adam Beck, DMin

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ABSTRACT

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by
Heather M. Jallad
United Theological Seminary, 2023

Mentor

Michael Adam Beck, DMin

The context of this project is the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The problem is a lack of an effective discipleship process in a post-Christendom context. Fresh Expressions (FX) is a form of traditioned innovation that catalyzes effective discipleship. The project was conducted over eight weeks and measured the impact of engaging in the process of forming FX of church on effective discipleship. Data was collected through pre/post-questionnaires, comparative analysis employing an existing questionnaire utilized by the Church of England, group discussions, and post-workshop interviews. This project will substantiate the catalytic impact of FX on discipleship.

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DEDICATION

To my incredibly supportive husband Marten who never imagined he would be married to a pastor; thank you for your unwavering faithfulness and love. I literally could not have done this without you!

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ABBREVIATIONS

FX	Fresh Expressions
FX-C	Fresh Expressions of Church
NGA	North Georgia
UMC	United Methodist Church
UK	United Kingdom
NA	North America

“if the church fails to make the shift to apostolic movements again, Christian influence in Western culture will continue to fade, and church attendance will remain in its current trajectory of decline. All we can say in writing this book is, not on our shift! Not if we can help it.”

—Alan Hirsch, *On the Verge: A Journey Into the Apostolic Future of the Church*

INTRODUCTION

The steady decline in the church may lead one to deduce that as disciples of Jesus, we have forgotten our mission of fishing for people. Instead, we need new models for fishing. The church lacks an effective process for discipleship in a post-Christendom context. The numbers tell the story as does the seeming apostolic amnesia that permeates church culture.¹ The Fresh Expressions movement is one that once again calls us to obedience and reliance on Christ, as we cast the net on the other side, doing an old thing a new way. We can no longer rely solely on methods that may have worked in the past but must engage in new ways in the communities that surround our churches, many of which will never come into our doors (John 21:6).² In this paper I propose that Fresh Expressions of Church are a form of traditioned innovation³ that catalyze effective discipleship.

Understanding effective discipleship begins with a shared definition of discipleship. For the purposes of this paper, discipleship is defined as the practices (worship, prayer, community, mission, generosity, evangelism, humility, sacrifice) that follow the example of Christ's life and embody a mutuality in relationship with God and

¹ "Signs of Decline and Hope among Key Metrics of Faith." Barna Group, March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

² Michael Adam Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches: Revitalizing the Church in the Blended Ecology* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2019), 53.

³ L. Gregory Jones, "Traditioned Innovation," *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*, January 19, 2009, <https://faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation>.

others. Many of these practices are seemingly lacking and/or internally focused in the existing church which is especially problematic when our society is far from centered and intertwined in Christianity, or post-Christendom. Certainly, the church as an institution in its inherited form has many gifts of our historic faith to share with the world. However, our current reality speaks to the need for new ways of doing an old thing, or traditioned innovation.

Traditioned innovation is something theologian Greg Jones defines as, “a way of thinking and being that holds the past and the future in tension, not in opposition.”⁴

Theologian Len Wilson would call this Christian innovation, as this new way of doing an old thing includes both its incarnate and eternal value.⁵ FX are a new way of doing an old thing, a form of church for our changing world that is created primarily for people that are not yet a part of any church. The implications for FX and their impact on discipleship are far and wide. I have witnessed and experienced the growth and maturity of inherited church disciples that have started and continue to participate in FX in my current context. This points to possible solutions that will be unpacked in this paper through biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundation research and a project with said disciples.

In chapter one, I will discuss the presenting problem and reflect on how my current context and experience point to possible solutions. The church is not the sole recipient of the gospel but instead is meant to bear witness to it in the world. “Witness does not reduce to the internal life of the church; the community is not an end in

⁴ Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*.

⁵ Len Wilson, *Greater Things: The Work of the New Creation* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2021), 67.

herself.”⁶ As worship attendance continues to decline, and this decline has only accelerated due to a global pandemic, new ways, and new bodies of water in which to fish are needed.

In chapter two, I discuss the final appearance of Jesus in John’s gospel and its implications for the church. Jesus’s commissioning and multiplication of mission prior to his death, resurrection, and ascension remain instructive for the church today. The church is reaping what it has sown in our lack of faithfulness and obedience to both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. “If the community is Christian only insofar as she is missionary, if the missionary act is the concrete form of divine and human fellowship here and now, then the lack of reference to mission at every level of the teaching ministry of the church is a frightful abrogation of theological responsibility.”⁷

The whole body of Christ, gifted and sent, must return to the mission of God in obedience if we are to make disciples, who make disciples. “Mission is the abundant fellowship of active participation in the very glory that is the life of God from and to all eternity. It is life in the community of reconciliation moving out in solidarity with the world in the active knowledge that God died for it, too.”⁸ Still in 2018 Barna released the results of a study that reported that 51% of US churchgoers did not know what the Great Commission was. Another 25% were familiar with the term but had no idea what it meant.⁹

⁶ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 293.

⁷ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 296.

⁸ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 296-297.

⁹ “51% Of Churchgoers Don’t Know of the Great Commission,” Barna Group, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>.

In chapter three, the life and practice of the Beguines amplify the value of the FX movement in a post-Christendom reality. “Fresh expressions of church are valued not mainly as means of advancing pastoral, social and ecological agendas, but as ways of communicating with post-Christian people ‘to enable them to become committed communities of followers of Jesus.’”¹⁰ The Beguines are a powerful example of Christian community. Quoting Lesslie Newbigin in *Church in Life*, Michael Moynagh emphasizes that the church is meant to be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom and Jesus’s divine purpose by taking Jesus into all the settings of life. “New ecclesial communities make the church present publicly in all the cavities of life.”¹¹

The institutional church, one might observe, is increasingly internally focused furthering its lack of effective discipleship. “The church is called to serve the world through acts of mercy and justice, by proclaiming the gospel and by modeling the kingdom. It can do this through Christian communities that draw near to people in their ordinary lives and engage with their agendas in a pinpointed manner.”¹² This is a paradigm shift for the “come to us” attractional models of church that are currently the norm. “Inviting people into an accessible community often requires the church to create new communities, which are the right shape for the people they seek to serve.”¹³

In chapter four, I expound upon the significance of moving toward a missional ecclesiology as Christian community shaped and formed around the mission looks

¹⁰ Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 157.

¹¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 189.

¹² Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 190.

¹³ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 151-152.

differently than the church one likely encounters today. The nature and structure of the church, or ecclesiology, is a framework for its form and function. In a post-Christendom context, our existing ecclesiology is a contributing factor to the decline. The internal, hierarchical, and professionalized clergy systems formed in Christendom were created for a world that no longer exists, one where the church was at the center of society. A return to a missional ecclesiology, or a church organized around mission, is necessary to recapture the apostolic, incarnational, contextual, and formational identity that birthed the church. In addition, a shift, a new understanding of our ecclesiology, from a solo leader or paid professional Christian to the priesthood of all believers the apostle Peter identifies as God's people in his first letter, empowered and equipped by the Spirit and sent to the world together, is imperative (1 Peter 2:4-5). A whole church for the whole world.

“The Christian community is a missionary community, or she is not the Christian community,” emphasizes Flett.¹⁴ This looks like a life of self-donation in exchange for what is far more prevalent in the existing church, lives of self-preservation. “The community learns what new forms of obedience the Spirit requires only as she presses to a fuller understanding of the kingdom. As Jesus Christ learned obedience once through the things that he suffered (Heb. 5:8), so his community learns obedience through her prophetic calling into the world for which God is. In dogmatic parlance, the church exists only as *ecclesia semper reformanda*.” The church in its apostolic and evangelistic act must always be reforming and renovating herself.¹⁵

¹⁴ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

¹⁵ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

God is a sending God and sends the church into the world to go and make disciples. Our inward and academic focus on what it means to be disciples and make disciples forfeits the commission that God has invited us to be a part of. Fresh Expressions reorient the focus and reframe what it means to be a disciple with incarnational witness and practice. The FX movement invites believers to recognize and utilize their unique gifts in building Christian community with people who will never likely walk into our existing churches. These new Christian communities form in the everyday places and spaces, networks, and neighborhoods, where lives are lived. By nature, FX are missional (sent), incarnational (embodied), formational (growing in a shared life together with Christ and others), ecclesial (Christocentric community that evidences the marks of the church), and contextual (take seriously the cultural context), breaking down the institutional norms and “one size fits all approaches” our existing churches assume.

We cannot continue to expect people to come to us. However wonderful our worship, preaching, and programs may be, the church is no longer the center of society. As the church is deployed to form FX, discipleship is activated in an entirely new way. Disciples are given permission and empowered to use their gifts. As a result, ideas, and experiences of what it means to be a disciple are stretched and strengthened, and disciples encounter new people with a new awareness of the Great Commission and their part in it outside the walls of the existing church. A new ecosystem emerges as these disciples are gathered within the existing church, they bring new understanding and awareness to the body. While getting people back to the existing church is never the goal, this too

sometimes happens. Here new believers are introduced to the body, and the church continues to adapt and mature while multiplication of disciples continues.

In chapter five, I employ a knowledge transfer from one field to another through a focus on bees and the variety of impacts that pollinating bees have on our ecosystem. This has the potential to serve as a model and metaphor for the ecology of the church. In many ways, we make being the church complicated, and yet “while the church is a significantly complex living organism, we should not need an advanced degree to understand and talk about her.”¹⁶

The authors of *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* address the challenges of the unknown uncovered in their own beekeeping adventure. From cultivating an atmosphere for the “natural” (bees) in an urban landscape to the fear of an increase of stings on the campus where they began to keep the bees, the metaphors and connections to the integration of FX in existing models of church that lead to discipleship multiplication are endless.¹⁷ Often FX are perceived as competition for the existing church rather than an additional expression for people that will likely never walk in our doors. Likewise, Delaplane and Mayer speak to the benefits of crop pollination by bees and describe them as endless. Good pollination translates to higher quality and yield, larger fruit, and faster ripening.¹⁸ These factors highlight how FX, as they are introduced to the ecosystem of the current models of church, create a blended and therefore more diverse and resilient ecology that produces fruit and multiplication.

¹⁶ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 165.

¹⁷ Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut, *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Keith S. Delaplane and Daniel F. Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees* (Wallingford, CT: CABI Publishing, 2005), 38.

Pollinating bees are an integral part of our ecosystem. Likewise, effective discipleship multiplication processes are an integral part of the ecosystem of the church and its long-term sustainability in God's mission. How bees organize themselves, understand their roles, and work together for the good of the whole, speak directly to our understanding, or lack thereof, of the individual parts in the body of Christ working together as a whole to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission, God's agenda, not our own. This is the democratization of the church. Finally, the practice of consistent work done by bees, oriented toward sustaining the next generation, is eye-opening to our current disciple-making methods that are all too often academic and individualistic.

Chapter six shares the details of the project executed to ground the FX movement in biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations while testing the implications of the proposed solution of FX on discipleship. Why are so many in the West accustomed to a disembodied, contemplative faith to the detriment of following the incarnational witness of Jesus? What are the postures, practices, and rhythms that might re-engage believers? How might the church regain its outward, missional, and apostolic posture? These are just some of the questions I address in my project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

As someone who has come late to the journey with Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit to the institutional church, I recognize the potential in taking the church to the people and meeting them where they are. It is not so long ago that I remember sitting outside the main sanctuary of the church where I met Jesus for the first time, listening to the sermon over the sound system piped into the “gathering room.” I wondered what on earth I was doing there, afraid the building might fall in on me or that I would do something wrong and bring attention to myself. Years later I have preached in a room with a capacity of 2400 making this a somewhat distant and foreign memory, and yet it is not. It is all too familiar to me and to many others. Fewer and fewer find themselves at home in our inherited models of church. The landscape of our communities has changed and is changing, and the gulf between these forms of church and our communities continues to grow. Furthermore, in my own return to the church as someone in her late twenties about to start a family, I also recognize that many who would return to church at a similar point are waiting later and later to start their families, widening the gap between their experiences of church at a younger age (if at all) and now later as an adult.

In this chapter I will expound on how my experiences of God, the church, and my current context have led me to this work and its potential implications for the future of the church. The gift of the church for me as a young mother was family, connection, and

purpose, and yet I did not find that in the world but in a body that met in a building. This was nothing less than the work of the Spirit married to the circumstances of my life. I was tuned in because of this milestone season, but I knew no one in the church, and it took a great deal of courage to go, even led by the Spirit.

I cannot help but wonder how that experience might have been different if the church I became a part of was already engaging in FX-C in the surrounding community. Would I have met someone in my neighborhood, the local restaurants we frequented as a childless young couple, or the gym where I worked out? Why didn't my neighbors, whom I later discovered went to the same church, invite me? The utter disconnect between the Great Commission and empowering of the Holy Spirit for the people of God to "GO!" and the lack of going is a symptom of a larger problem. This is not specific to one church or context but emblematic of the institutional church in a post Christendom context. It is no wonder, as Beck and Sweet comment in their book *Contextual Intelligence*, that "pastors are largely caring for the dwindling numbers of faithful but fidgety, feisty, and fearful church members, and they are often overwhelmed by the infighting that comes from facing inward, not outward, with little connection to the greater community."¹⁹

In my work and walk prior to receiving my call to the vocation of ministry, I frequently found myself leading people much older and more seasoned than myself. While disconcerting and often uncomfortable, these were the places my gifts were discovered and honed to serve the church. From a 21-year-old college graduate supervising adults two and three times my age, in a fast paced, multi-million-dollar retail

¹⁹ Michael Adam Beck and Leonard Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Services, 2021), 26.

environment, to being a new Christian and writing and leading small group studies and classes for people who had spent their lives in the church, these circumstances and opportunities have been the occasions for God's grace to both guide and sustain me, perhaps especially when I did not perceive it. Even as a middle child of five in my family of origin, my own return to the church precipitated that of my mother and two of my siblings. I utilized the apostle, prophet, evangelist gifts God has provided, and though sometimes questioned or perceived by others as less than helpful, these gifts continue to be strengthened. This sort of outsider's view and experience has served to heighten my awareness of the gaps between the existing institution of the church and the world in a variety of ways.

In my current context, there is a heightened focus on discipleship models and yet those models rely solely on the people who walk in the building or ironically are mission partners overseas. The model is dependent upon attracting people to the building through excellent worship services, inspiring preaching, and the best programs. This model assumes a Christendom mindset and the pervasive belief in *if we build it, they will come* and a shared value for what is happening in the building. This is especially problematic given the escalating decline in average worship attendance across the region.

I was told recently that small group participation, the main vehicle for disciple making, follows the trends of worship attendance but lags behind it in numbers by a year or two. With a growing decrease in worship attendance in one church in the region, from an all-time high of over 5000 in the last 10 years to now an average of 1200, the writing, as they say, is on the wall. If we continue to do what we do in the same ways we've always done it, we will get the same results. What would it look like to create a catalytic

discipleship model that I am calling “outward facing discipleship?” It sounds oxymoronic, and yet I believe it is exactly what we need to work toward in order to reemphasize the apostolic nature and “sent-ness of the church into the world” once again.

In my work in the FX movement and prior, what has been brought to light time and again is the disconnect between the followers of Jesus and the world, and the world and the people of God. The language they speak is different. The values they have in how and where they spend their time are different. The rhythms of life are different.

What I have learned in cross cultural discipleship in seminary and training for mission internationally, has become increasingly more applicable to the mission field that is right outside our front doors and leaves me with many questions. How do we begin to engage our communities as followers of Jesus? How do we begin to make disciples who do not see a scarcity within the existing church body but an abundance of people in the world outside our church walls whom God loves and has called and sent us to in order to make disciples? How can our existing, mostly academic, head knowledge, models of discipleship become more immersive and incarnational after the example of Jesus’s own discipleship model, which looked more like an apprenticeship than a Bible study class? How might our missional and incarnational impulse invite new and creative ways of being the church in the world to light and breathe new life into a body on life support?

Dr. Jay Moon quotes President of Asbury Theological Seminary Tim Tennant’s words to the incoming students in 2016 in the opening of his book, *Entrepreneurial Church Planting*, “Welcome to life on the fastest growing mission field in the world: North America.”²⁰ He shares further: “While in previous generations the church was

²⁰ Fredrick J. Long and W. Jay Moon, *Entrepreneurial Church Planting: Engaging Business and Mission for Marketplace Transformation* (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2018), 3.

often considered to be a benevolent organization in the center of the culture (like a chaplain of society), the Western church now finds herself marginalized and losing her public voice in the wider culture with decreasing church attendance in successive generations.”²¹ Anyone who might be an objective observer of the church in North America must agree that the church is losing her overall influence in society. The question is, “How much influence is being lost and at what speed is this occurring?”²²

I have seen and experienced the impact of the FX movement on the maturity of disciples and the body they identify as their local church. This project seeks to substantiate that impact and demonstrate the benefits of starting FX-C for disciples individually and the church. When starting a dinner church, my entry into the FX movement in a previous context, I witnessed disciples many would have considered mature being stretched further, as they were pressed to reinterpret their faith in a new context with new people less than a mile and half away from the local church. “Inherited churches can and are being revitalized by adopting the fresh expressions approach in the mixed economy or blended ecology way. While revitalization is not the goal, it is an effect of joining God’s disruptive cause amid the fragmentation and isolation of human community. What comes to life is a synergistic relationship occurring between inherited and emerging modes of church that result in a new complex organism.”²³

When I think of synergy, I think of a perfect pairing, alignment, smooth, and seamless, and yet my experience in the church has rarely been that. While time and

²¹ Long and Moon, 3.

²² Long and Moon, 3.

²³ Michael Adam Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches: Revitalizing the Church in the Blended Ecology* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2019), 9.

opportunity have highlighted the gifts I have been given, which are seemingly needed, they seem often not to have been recognized as such. Instead, these gifts that speak the truth in love, call out unfaithfulness, or call the church back to its mission, seem to lead to rough patches and misunderstandings. This has certainly been accentuated in my latest roles. I am appointed as an ordained elder to serve a mid-sized local church and serve as Lead Cultivator of FX in the North Georgia Conference. Additionally, I serve as a Trainer and Mission Strategist for Fresh Expressions NA. In this variety of roles, I have gained and am able to provide different perspectives as one who sees our current reality from a variety of angles, while not being so deeply steeped within any of them to be blinded to the particularity of their contexts. I believe this is a valuable gift to offer the church in each of the contexts I inhabit, as one informs and has the potential to transform the other.

The variety of roles brings with it a variety of fields in which to test and experiment with tools, training, and new practices that will lean into a more holistic disciple making model, which in turn, lends itself to multiplication. I believe outward facing discipleship that recaptures the missional and incarnational nature of Christ's example not only takes notice of what is happening "out there" as a field for disciple making and multiplication but simultaneously strengthens and matures existing disciples and seeds the fields around us for multiplication. My project work is to identify effective practices within the disciple's journey that will catalyze growth and maturity in the individual, as well as in the body of believers they are a part of. Likewise, these processes engage new people in new places and continue to seed the soil as people go, cross pollinate as people sow in new fields, graft as people integrate and introduce new and creative and contextualized forms of church as cultivation continues. I believe this

process will not only produce disciples but will produce fruitful disciples that consistently value those who are not yet a part of the church, as well as valuing what these “outsiders” might have to teach those who are already followers. Additionally, a dual transformation in both the formation of the outsiders and the maturity of the already followers will take place.

The FX movement is a means to call the church back to faithfulness to its mission. FX are defined as a form of church for our changing world, created primarily for people who are not yet a part of any church. The incarnational and missional impulse of the church has become lost in the internal, attractional, Christendom mode that assumes a certain homogenous quality to a world that is growing in diversity and changing at breakneck speed around us, a world that is very much operating in post-Christendom. Like so many professional clergy who have been trained for a world that no longer exists, the church seemingly still operates in a manner that misses the mark in both the incarnational, and relational qualities that defined Jesus’s life and mission and the missional, always moving out, sent-ness defined by the Great Commission. “Whereas less than a lifetime ago, church and culture washed each other’s hands, the culture now has washed its hands of the church and makes sure the church’s dirty linens are aired in public.”²⁴

The dinner churches begun in two previous contexts served largely underserved portions of the population as we partnered with a local food pantry and a local apartment complex. These were Great Commission environments ripe for disciple-making, the making of those who would already call themselves disciples and those who would not

²⁴ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 6.

yet identify themselves in that manner. Context, and attentiveness to it, matter if we are to be effective witnesses for the good news. “Jesus’ life and ministry initiate this transformation, but the rest of the New Testament is formed in response. The story of the early church is the story of the first disciples unlearning, improvising, and responding to these implications.”²⁵ Disciples were formed in the practice, in the going, and in the responding.

The table fellowship in dinner churches creates a liminal space that bears a strong resemblance to the heavenly banquet table. Often my friend Verlon Fosner, who began a dinner church movement in one of the most secular places in the US, Seattle, speaks to this environment as one in which you need street-fighting Jesus, not the domesticated, Americanized pretty boy with flowing locks and blue eyes. This has certainly been my experience, one that is sometimes chaotic, often unpredictable, but always a place where God shows up and astounds us. Len Sweet shares, “Our salvation is not through rules, rites, rituals, or religious principles. Our salvation comes through a God who comes to eat with us at the table and to feed us with his very presence.”²⁶

While these ripe new fields were very close in proximity to the “mother ship,” a “first” church and a mega church, there were many more fields in our midst where the good news was yet to be proclaimed in living color. One could argue that the pandemic reality of 2020 presented a new field, in which many of our neighbors were tuned in, listening, and attentive to who God is and what God might be doing. “A post-COVID world requires the church to read the Story again from a new vantage point, not so we can

²⁵ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 18.

²⁶ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 112.

stockpile and be selfish but so we can reach out to others in healing, kindness, and service. When contexts change, the church must be prepared to fast-forward the future, which is often found in a harkening back and taking back of the past from a backslidden present.”²⁷ Dinner Church, a model centered in table fellowship born of the apostolic era is certainly that!

In *Longing for Spring*, Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker argue for a more serious and communal experience of Christianity and remind us that the early stories of intentional community have something to offer us as we seek to renew the church. Like the revival of table fellowship in the dinner church movement, the authors emphasize the need to revisit the past, so that we might live into the future God intends in expanding the kingdom. One might call the dinner church movement today a form of “traditioned innovation,” bringing the best parts of our past into the present in new ways.

The pre-Constantinian era of the church centered largely on table fellowship in communal spaces. “The expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire prior to the Constantinian era was quite amazing. It was not due to strategic wielding of social influence or clever marketing.”²⁸ The authors go on to share an excerpt from a letter to Diogenes written around AD 200. They describe the people called Christians to a Roman official and speak to how they are fully integrated members of society, emphasizing the implications of such a way of living versus the sort of extractive, sacred against secular Christianity practiced post-Constantine to today.

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither

²⁷ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 24-25.

²⁸ Elaine A. Heath and Scott Thomas Kisker, *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2010), 15.

do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life... While they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians...and follow the native custom in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth is marvelous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners...²⁹

Further, Heath and Kisker argue the need for a new monasticism with a guiding rule that emphasizes an embodiment like Wesley's general rules, saying we have simplified these to the point where we have denied the application that Wesley highly valued. "Underneath each precept Wesley detailed a variety of applications."³⁰ They propose that perhaps using the framework of the vows made in the UMC might be a seedbed for us to begin to think in greater specificity about the application and embodiment of what we vow in our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and Christian witness-adapting details of the rule to its mission and location. The framework would provide the consistency across the diversity of expressions, while the specific applications would be contextualized.³¹

The world indeed continues to change at a rapid pace and finds itself in uncharted territory. The 2020 pandemic not only accelerated the change but likely the decline of the church, particularly those that operate in a Christendom mindset. Using the backdrop of the Lewis and Clark expedition and exploration of the Louisiana purchase, Tod Bolsinger speaks to the need to design new maps for the uncharted territory of the post-Christendom church and likely the post COVID-19 world. Adaptive challenges, "arise when the world around us has changed but we continue to live on the successes of

²⁹ Heath and Kisker, *Longing for Spring*, 15

³⁰ Heath and Kisker, *Longing for Spring*, 52.

³¹ Heath and Kisker, *Longing for Spring*, 52.

the past. They are challenges that cannot be solved through compromise or win-win scenarios, or by adding another ministry or staff person to the team.”³² These are technical solutions and are no match for adaptive challenges. Neither can they be solved by focusing on historical metrics of success in worship attendance, professions of faith, baptisms, or the like. Fortunately, I have been able to lead one of the churches I have served, along with 3 others in the North Georgia Conference, to become a part of the Adaptive Church Leadership cohort, a joint venture between FX-US and Tod Bolsinger of Fuller Theological Seminary. This cohort encompasses an eighteen-month process designed to lead a team from each church in practices and processes that equip them to identify and navigate adaptive challenges.

Emphasizing the futility of the “try harder” or “same old way of thinking,” Bolsinger adds, “The answer is not to try harder but to start a new adventure: to look over the Lemhi Pass and let the assumptions of the past go. To see not the absence of a water route but the discovery of a new, uncharted land beckoning us forward—yes, in the face of the uncertainties, fears, and potential losses—to learn and to be transformed.”³³ In the opening chapter of the book, *On the Verge*, Hirsch and Ferguson quote Abraham Lincoln who said, “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, we must think anew, and act anew.”³⁴

³² Tod E. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 19.

³³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 33.

³⁴ Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 23.

Change and adaptation are problematic in institutional, attractional models of church that rely on people coming to them. “Most revitalization strategies fail because they never escape the same institutional thinking that created the problems in to begin with.”³⁵ We turn readily to technical solutions that fail to meet the changing climate with helpful solutions. We do not know what we do not know because we are so deeply immersed in institutional thinking and being. Bolsinger likens this to the “inherited tools” that Lewis and Clark took with them on the expedition. One needs boats, in this case canoes, to traverse waterways. They took canoes with them not anticipating anything different. However, it became apparent that these tools would not help but instead hinder their progress and therefore had to be laid aside to continue.

What might we need to lay aside? What might we need to unlearn, so that we might begin again? Likewise, in our inherited models there is a proclivity to strategize for revitalization in detail often assuming how it will be received or perceived without doing the slow work of listening to the world “outside.” Furthermore, it is, “Little wonder that the missionary zeal within the Church has slowed down, because a closed organization discourages the apostolic creativity essential to the refounding process.”³⁶

The fundamental cause, as summarized by Historian Thomas Bokenkotter, of the contemporary crisis in the Church, is “the tension of letting go the long ‘held classicist view of the Church in favor of the historically conscious stance. The former view sees the Church as moving through centuries ‘more or less unaffected by history.’ The second approach he says, ‘acknowledges how much institutions, governing precepts and basic

³⁵ Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches*, 90.

³⁶ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 33.

ideas about religion and morality are shaped by history and therefore how relative they are.”³⁷ Additionally, there is a desire for certainty and success that has an aversion to risk or experimentation, or the adaptability needed to be nimble as the listening and responsiveness continues. Further, the financial resources, communication plans, and volunteer forces often needed for “new things” such as these are not sustainable and perpetuate the professionalized and often staff-led programmatic religious activity that fails to meet people where they are outside of the church walls. This posture assumes that people will come to us. This assumption in turn perpetuates the learned helplessness of the body and a failure of the priesthood. “The day of professionalized ministry among a permanently immature and sterile flock must yield to a new day when, in the words of Abbot Jerry Moore, ‘every Christian puts on his or her baptism’ and welcomes a missional life.”³⁸

The institutional church lacks an effective discipleship process in this post-Christendom landscape. The FX movement is a form of traditioned innovation that catalyzes effective discipleship. Traditioned innovation is a term coined by theologian L. Gregory Jones and is, “a way of thinking and being that holds the past and the future in tension, not in opposition.”³⁹ Jones argues that this is crucial to the growth and vitality of Christian institutions. “Christian leaders are called to a particular type of social entrepreneurship—one that does not force us to choose preserving tradition or leading change but thinking about them together. We are called to ‘traditioned innovation’ as a

³⁷ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 35.

³⁸ Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 57.

³⁹ L. Gregory Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*, January 19, 2009, <https://faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation>.

pattern of thinking, bearing witness to the Holy Spirit who is conforming us to Christ.”⁴⁰

Innovation is not new to Christian organizations and churches, states Jones. “We have typically called it bearing witness to the Holy Spirit, the One who is making all things new.”⁴¹ Dave Ferguson quotes H. Richard Niebuhr in *On the Verge*, sharing, “The great Christian revolutions come not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when someone takes radically something that was always there.”⁴²

FX, as previously defined, are a form of church for our changing world, created primarily for people who are not yet a part of church. “Fresh Expressions is a movement of the Holy Spirit cultivating new forms of church alongside existing congregations to reach a changing world. The focus is doing life alongside not-yet-Christians as we are formed as disciples of Jesus Christ together.”⁴³ The movement began in the UK in response to the decline seen in average worship attendance and in response to a study, *The Mission Shaped Church Report*, and what it revealed about what the Holy Spirit was doing in forming Christian community in some unexpected places in unexpected ways outside of the walls of the existing church. In paying attention to what God was doing, the pioneers of the movement began to intentionally listen and inhabit the places and spaces everyday people frequent and consider how God might be inviting them to join in God’s mission. In doing so, the *Declaration of Assent* in the Church of England might be more fully realized, that which “professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy

⁴⁰ Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*.

⁴¹ Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*.

⁴² Hirsch and Ferguson, *On the Verge*, 277.

⁴³ Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches*, 53.

Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the *Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.*^{44 45}

This project seeks to demonstrate how starting FX have the potential to round out our anemic existing processes of discipleship. The project substantiates that integrating, “outward facing,” disciple-making practices that leverage the best parts of our past in our apostolic and Wesleyan roots, while recognizing the particularity of our diverse contexts in a world that is ever changing, impacts effectiveness. A local church and conference context serve as my primary laboratory. Practices, workshops, and tools were used to experiment with, train others, and share in each of these contexts.

The project’s discipleship questionnaire and workshops have the potential to be utilized to develop a coaching tool. These tools will invite churches to deeply engage in the process of unlearning, learning, and discerning a more integrated approach to form faithful and maturing disciples as apprentices after the example of Jesus. Additionally, I anticipate the creation and iteration of practices and processes for church leaders that catalyze discipleship and create a culture that births FX-Cs.

The questionnaire and workshop not only provide insight as to where churches are in understanding what it means to be a disciple but can be used as a tool for coaching in FX practices and processes, such as prayer walking, immersion experiences, embodied service, cross cultural discipleship, and relational evangelism practices. These practices assist in developing a culture that births FX-C. Beck and Sweet use the metaphor of the canvas primer gesso that artists use to prepare a canvas before painting to preserve the

⁴⁴ Graham Cray, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (New York, NY: Seabury, 2010), 100.

⁴⁵ Emphasis mine.

finished product as a metaphor for the preparatory work that needs to be done in our communities for the mission of God to stick in the particularity of our contexts. “This prework protects the canvas from deterioration, and the layer of primer helps bring out the colors in a more pronounced way.” Going further to say, “Proper priming can minimize problems on the surface later.”⁴⁶ These priming practices not only serve the already believers in their understanding of effective disciple making but engage potential new believers to tune in, in new and creative ways.

In his article on traditioned innovation Gregory Jones shares, “Biologists such as Marc Kirschner and John Gerhart in their *“Plausibility of Life”* have compellingly argued that organisms must preserve significant features of their processes while changing others. A great surprise of modern biology, they suggest, has been how important conservation is to the process of adaptive change.”⁴⁷ In turn this begs the question as to how we find the place of tension and complement versus competition with our existing forms of church.

Experimentation is important to develop efficient and contextually replicable practices and processes. Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins seem to support this approach in their book *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, saying, “Helping people to fail boldly is one of the greatest tasks in pioneering new forms of ministry. If we can help each other view failure and error as useful teachers, we will not only be more humble, gracious, and compassionate when we ourselves fail, but we will be able to help one another gain wisdom and not take ourselves too seriously.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 45.

⁴⁷ Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” *Traditioned Innovation | Faith and Leadership*.

⁴⁸ Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 63.

Heath and Duggins share further about this new context that the church finds itself in and call us to reevaluate our models and practices: “We believe that God has initiated the pruning of the church that we now experience, so that we can be free of attachments that keep us from our missional vocation. We believe that our job is to live in a contemplative stance: to show up, pay attention, cooperate with God, and release the outcome.”⁴⁹ They add that “we have a lot of work to do to heal the wounds of church functioning as empire, and to prepare the church to serve as Jesus serves.”⁵⁰ Of note is the fact that only certain species of plants grow in certain climates. The climate has changed. We need to experiment with new species.

Catholic Priest, Gerald Arbuckle, seems to agree, quoting a letter written by J.H. Newman in 1843, he writes that “a system that is not continuously examining alternatives is not likely to evolve creatively.”⁵¹ He goes on to say: “Confronted with the possibility or reality of chaos, and the anxiety it evokes, people usually act to reaffirm their culture’s or organization’s traditional identity, structures, and boundaries.”⁵² Pruning is needed. New experiments that include ingrafting set the stage for new forms of church. In a rapidly changing world.

According to William Abraham, “the same can be said of the work done by the corporate theological endeavors sponsored by the United Methodist Church in America. New winds are, of course, blowing, but it is fair to say that the whole ethos and content of twentieth-century theology to date has been incipiently hostile to tackling the

⁴⁹ Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 17.

⁵⁰ Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 23.

⁵¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 1.

⁵² Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 1.

fundamental issues raised by those interested in evangelism.”⁵³ Furthermore, he adds, “each generation has to tackle the issues that catch its imagination and vehemently cry out for its attention. But we do need to be cognizant of the theological context in which we are operating, and we should not be too surprised to find that our efforts are not greeted initially with great enthusiasm.”⁵⁴ Beck and Sweet seem to concur saying, “In an incarnational model, you love your way into the new; you don’t work your way out of the old. You rise to the future more by exercising the promises of the past than by appraising and appraising the guises and disguises of the past.”⁵⁵

Beck counts the fruit of the traditioned innovation of FX sharing: “The effects we can see on inherited congregations are immediately obvious: 1) they force declining congregations to awaken from apostolic amnesia, look outside themselves, and listen to their community 2) congregation catches fire with the spirit of evangelism, 3) priesthood of all believers released as a local missionary force to offer adaptive leadership 4) people who experience Jesus through fresh expressions sometimes matriculate back to the existing congregation 5) the church reorganizes itself around the new disruptive work of the Spirit taking place.”⁵⁶ Likewise, these are outcomes I anticipate as these tools, practices, and processes are experimented with and shared in a variety of contexts to remember our future as the church and make disciples who make disciples.

Jesus Christ challenged the religious systems of his time. “With patience, courage, and love he challenged the religious and cultural status quo of his times by proposing an

⁵³ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 6.

⁵⁴ William J. Abraham, 6.

⁵⁵ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 50.

⁵⁶ Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches*, 14.

alternative way of life and by living what he preached.”⁵⁷ It is more than time to do likewise. According to Greg Jones, “Too much change creates chaos, transformative change rooted in tradition and the preservation of wisdom cultivated the adaptive work that is crucial to the ongoing vitality and growth of any organism, Christian institutions included.”⁵⁸ Arbuckle lists the following actions as necessary for re-founding the church: Claim your authority as a member of the Church, acknowledge deficiencies in the church, and naturing one’s faith in prayer,” which he describes as a posture of humility and powerlessness apart from God.⁵⁹ This member of the church has taken authority, sees the deficiencies, and has and will continue to nurture my faith in prayer.

⁵⁷ Arbuckle, Refounding, 2.

⁵⁸ Jones, “Traditioned Innovation,” Traditioned innovation | Faith and Leadership

⁵⁹ Arbuckle, Refounding, 31-32.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Doing an old thing a new way

God is a sending God. Our apostolic amnesia makes the case for reminders of our sentness. While all the gospels speak to the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit and the commissioning of the church, John's gospel offers something unique.

John's gospel is undeniably different than the synoptics. He seeks to tell the story of a new beginning, evident in an opening chapter that echoes the creation story. God is re-creating. God has done this before and yet now is doing it again in a new way. In this chapter, I will examine this act of re-creating in the apostolic nature and mission of the church and the call to be and make disciples in obedience to Jesus's invitation to join him in this work of multiplication by focusing specifically on John 21:1-14. Here the mission of the church is reiterated in an epilogue. Jesus is once more revealed and fishing is reframed, as the disciples are obedient in doing an old thing a new way. As a result, miraculous multiplication takes place. I will unpack some of the significant contextual elements that influenced the writing of this gospel and its first hearers. I will discuss in detail the debate surrounding John 21 and its implications for my project. Finally, I will speak to the significance of this passage and its foundational basis for my project.

John's gospel opens with a new genesis in Christ. God is making all things new. "John confronts his readers with a strange new Genesis. Whatever else his story is about,

it is to be interpreted in the light of a total narrative world that stretches back to the beginning of all creation.”⁶⁰ Though the last of the gospels written and the last chapter of John’s Gospel, in John 21, a seeming appendix, God is making all things new, again. “The prologue to the Gospel provides a theological statement about the activity of the Logos in the universe that would magnificently open an epistle; set as it is at the beginning of the Gospel, it provides an interpretation of the story of Jesus before the story is told.”⁶¹

John is said to have been written within the first century and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in AD 70.⁶² Though some surmise it was written by John, son of Zebedee, most often thought to be the beloved disciple, others believe it is another John known as the Presbyter. Many concur with Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons and student of Polycarp who spent time with the disciple himself and was emphatic that the gospel was authored by John the beloved. Irenaeus quoted and referred to John’s gospel far more frequently than any of the other gospels or even New Testament writers save Paul. The gospel itself claims to have been written by an eyewitness in 19:35 which, based on the book, suggests the beloved disciple, John, son of Zebedee, according to the other gospels.⁶³ Clement of Alexandria asserts “that John was written last, with full knowledge of the other three,” and seems to be confirmed by its placement in the canon.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, UK: SPCK, 2013), 411.

⁶¹ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), xxxii.

⁶² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 246.

⁶³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 246.

⁶⁴ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 29.

It is very different from the other gospels with Jesus speaking in a very different voice here than that of the synoptics. This is summed up in that “much of what is implicit in the other three Gospels becomes explicit in John.”⁶⁵ In the synoptics Jesus proclaims, the “Gospel of God,” while in John’s gospel he reveals himself and in doing so reveals the Father.⁶⁶

John “is focused quite explicitly on the Jewish story, not only in Genesis itself, but in the subsequent writings.”⁶⁷ Israel’s God is doing a new thing. “At numerous points in the narrative, John is deliberately evoking scenes from Israel’s past in order to say: all this is now reaching its appointed fulfillment. Jesus, like Moses only more so, feeds the people in the wilderness with bread from heaven; Jesus is the true shepherd who, as in Ezekiel 34, is to be distinguished from the false shepherds; he is the true Passover lamb.”⁶⁸

The focus on the Pharisees in the gospel might lead one to believe that the audience and context for its writing was Jewish Christians and the Pharisee’s opposition to them.⁶⁹ “The style of Jesus’ speaking in John differs from his words in the first three gospels.”⁷⁰ Some scholars argue that “John applies Jesus’ words to his readers’ situation under the “Spirit’s guidance.” The gospel has some specific areas of emphasis that contrast the Pharisees, God’s law and word which the Pharisees claim support their

⁶⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 30.

⁶⁶ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 30.

⁶⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 411.

⁶⁸ Wright, *People of God*, 412.

⁶⁹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 246.

⁷⁰ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 247.

positions.⁷¹ While the gospel's original hearers were likely Jewish Christians, the Greek world indeed largely influenced the text, with some seeing it "as the supreme example of a Jew seeking to understand his faith in the light of Hellenistic culture and explain it to the Gentile world."⁷²

Christ is presented as the Logos incarnate walking around on the earth. The gnostic interpretation of the gospel is due to a minimizing of the Jewish relationships it demonstrates. Interestingly, hermetic literature (instruction of Hermes, the Egyptian god Thoth) represents a type of religious thought "akin to one side of Johannine thought, without any substantial borrowing on one side or the others. At most we would be justified in affirming the Evangelist is concerned to convey the gospel of the Word made flesh to the kind of pagan reader who is acquainted with the thought embodied in Hermetic writings."⁷³

The gospel's "roots are in the ancient religions of the nearer Orient in which ancient Israel was set, and from which the Greeks themselves learned."⁷⁴ Several writings attest to this among them, "Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, in a letter to Pope Victor I ca, A.D 190, refers to the 'great lights' who were buried in Asia, awaiting the resurrection; among these were Philip, one of the apostles, and his three daughters (one of whom 'lived in the Holy Spirit'), and 'John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest wore the sacral plate; he sleeps at

⁷¹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 247.

⁷² Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, liv.

⁷³ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lvi-lvii.

⁷⁴ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lxx.

Ephesus.”⁷⁵ Still, these “roots” developed and spread out over time as they were further embodied. “What is eminently plausible is the origin of the traditions of the Fourth Gospel at an early date, and their development over a considerable period. A process akin to that proposed by R.E. Brown and O. Cullmann is most likely: an early tradition within the Johannine community became crystallized in the preaching and teaching of the Beloved Disciple, and it was taken up by the Evangelist and embodied in his own way in the Gospel.”⁷⁶

Tradition connects John’s gospel with Ephesus in Asia Minor. This is the case given similarities between the gospel and Paul’s letters to Colossians and Ephesians. Syria is most likely, “the Jewishness of this Gospel, and the intertwining of its *traditions* with those behind each of the synoptic Gospels, is consistent with Syrian origin”⁷⁷ One might therefore assume that the author is John the son of Zebedee or (in the view of some modern scholars) the mysterious John the Presbyter.⁷⁸ John’s Gospel “contributes to the theology of the New Testament by taking us back to where we began.”⁷⁹ Jesus’ mission is to reveal the Father and in doing so he reveals himself. “While there is nothing to shatter the conventional wisdom that it is the latest of the four Gospels, there is no way to prove it either.”⁸⁰ “In John there is little parabolic teaching, but there are many discourses, with dialogues and monologues, largely relating to the overarching theme of the transcendent

⁷⁵ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lxvii.

⁷⁶ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lxxviii.

⁷⁷ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 37-38.

⁷⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 38.

⁷⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 39.

⁸⁰ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 39.

significance of the mission of Jesus, and all are stamped with the style of the Evangelist.”⁸¹ The accent is not on conversion, or even on forgiveness of sins, but rather on revelation.⁸² The revealed God in Christ is one that we too are called to embody as the church and reveal to the world.

“Some scholars have drawn attention to points of indeterminacy, or “gaps” in the narrative, as it is presently found in John 1-20. Many of these are resolved if one reads John 21 on the part of an author to resolve these “gaps.”⁸³ One of those elements that is lacking in comparison to the synoptics to this point and resolved in John 21 is a “sense of mission for the Christian community.” Still others argue that there is no manuscript evidence whatsoever that the Gospel of John was ever circulated without chapter 21.⁸⁴ Paul Minear agrees, “that if the authorship of John 21 were to be determined by vocabulary alone, we would be forced to conclude that the chapter was written by the same author or group of authors (in close community) as was the rest of the Gospel.”⁸⁵

Without John 21 closure and commissioning are absent. Minear continues, “Only in chapter 21 do we discover an adequate end to the story of the two disciples who, from chapter 13 on, have played the most conspicuous supporting roles in the gospel: Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. They had left the stage in 20:10.”⁸⁶ For these reasons John

⁸¹ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, xxxii.

⁸² Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 42.

⁸³ Francis J. Moloney, “27 John 21 and the Johannine Story,” in *Johannine Studies: 1975-2017*, vol. 28 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 523.

⁸⁴ Paul S. Minear, “The Original Functions of John 21,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 1 (1983): p. 85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260747>, 86.

⁸⁵ Minear, *Functions of John*, 86.

⁸⁶ Minear, *Functions of John*, 91.

21 provides a satisfying end to the story of these two disciples of Jesus and begs the question as to what has been left undone in our lives as followers of Jesus.

While John 20:29 seems to conclude the accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances, John 20:30-31 seem to conclude the gospel. As a result, one might be led to believe that if the author planned to record the later appearance that we read of in John 21, he would have concluded John 20 differently.⁸⁷ Why then was this chapter added? What is its significance to the message of the gospel? The *Word Biblical Commentary* titles John 21 as "Epilogue: The Mission of the Church and Its Chief Apostles."⁸⁸ Most NT scholars agree that John 21 is "an addendum to the Gospel, whether it be described as an appendix, a postscript, or an epilogue, and whether it be put to the account of the Evangelist or to a later editor of the Johannine school."⁸⁹

Craig Keener titles the setting of this pericope "Failing at Fishing" in his commentary on the Gospel of John. This appearance of Jesus in John 21, says Keener, takes the previous resurrection appearances to a further level, extending the implications of the resurrection. Keener argues that John 21 does not enumerate all the gospel resurrection appearances but counts only those in this gospel as a further piece of evidence that favors Johannine authorship.⁹⁰ The inclusion of sign and symbol throughout seems packed with possibility in what it means to continue the work of the gospel in the world as disciples and apostles of Jesus. Further, some infer that this chapter outlines the

⁸⁷ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 395.

⁸⁸ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 392.

⁸⁹ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 395.

⁹⁰ Craig Keener, "The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes, Kindle EBook, , 2010, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gospel-John-2-Volumes-ebook/dp/B07KYWTFK1>, 1226.

mission of the church and its chief apostles while not limiting the work to the 12 or even the 7 named.⁹¹ The number of the disciples seems to be symbolic, 7, perhaps a whole discipleship group, whole body of disciples, or the Church.⁹²

The chapter opens with Peter announcing that he is going fishing. At least 6 other disciples decide to join him. Fishing was Peter's profession prior to Jesus calling him to follow him as a disciple. There is no hint of desperation, of aimlessness, or resignation however when Peter announces he is going fishing. Some have judged the disciples for returning to their previous way of life. But lest we question their motives or intentions, possibly abandoning the work Jesus had commissioned them for, still they must eat. One might even imagine that Peter found solace and familiarity there, as any of us would in such a state of disorientation, grief, and trying to figure out what comes next.

“Nothing in this Gospel so far has connected any of the disciples with fishing, yet here we find them fishing in Galilee, just as when they first met Jesus in those other accounts. Here they meet him again under similar circumstances, even though nothing is the same.”⁹³ Now, Jesus has been crucified and is no longer with them. The scripture says the disciples have already seen Jesus on two occasions, but this one seems different. It is dark, they fish all night, and they catch nothing. The emphasis of the writer seems not to be focused on the fact that the disciples went fishing but on the fact that they caught nothing that night.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 396.

⁹² Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 399.

⁹³ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1227-1228.

⁹⁴ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1030.

Keener adds that night fishing is more profitable, and fisherman can sell fish in the morning, further alleviating any judgment directed toward the disciples for returning to their previous profession. When they catch nothing, Jesus in a sense reminds them of their insufficiency apart from him when he asks if they have sufficient resources.⁹⁵ One cannot help but apply the benefits of fishing in darkness to the call to a post-Christendom church who tends to fish in the light.

Keener notes that John omits the Last Supper but presents Jesus at a wedding banquet and here feeding his disciples. “The use of bread and fish (21:13) plainly recalls Jesus’s provision of food in 6:11, probably emphasizing that as Jesus acted the part of host before the passion, he remains the host after the resurrection.”⁹⁶ Here we also find echoes of Luke 5:5 and Peter’s lament that they had fished all night and caught nothing.

Just after dawn, the sun now coming up, they see someone on the shore they do not initially recognize. The stranger addresses them as “children,” and asks whether they have caught anything, to which they reply, “no.” At that, they are instructed to cast the net on the other side of the boat. In doing so obediently, they almost catch more fish than they can pull in, 153 to be exact, and yet the net does not break. “That Jesus directed the disciples to throw their net on the right side of the boat is hardly likely to be due to the notion that the right side is the lucky one,” but rather an assumption of the “knowledge of the risen Lord beyond that of his orders, transcending the powers of the ordinary course

⁹⁵ Craig Keener, *“The Gospel of John,”* 1228.

⁹⁶ Craig Keener, *“The Gospel of John,”* 1231.

of nature.”⁹⁷ Jesus acts in extraordinary ways when we respond in obedience rather than our ability.

Jesus’ instructions to cast the net on the other side of the boat is confounding. The steering oar would be on the right side, and therefore nets would normally be cast on the left, making Jesus’ command unusual, not to mention the fact that casting the net on the other side would have meant pulling the catch in with your weaker arm (or so my fishing friends tell me). “His instructions to ‘throw the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find’ provides an unfolding revelation as to who Jesus is with echoes of his instructions in the other Gospels such as ‘Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you’ (Mt. 7:7//Lk 11:9). Here he instructs, ‘throw...and you will find.’”⁹⁸ Jesus’s question seems to expect a negative answer, “perhaps not so strongly as to merit the rendering, ‘You don’t have any catch, do you?’—that is ‘an ironical hint that Jesus knew the helplessness of the disciples when left on their own’”⁹⁹—yet it has much the same effect. It is a simple inquiry, and yet it does uncover how helpless they are on their own.¹⁰⁰

That the disciples obey the master indicates the obedience involved in discipleship. It is noteworthy that these were not hobbyist fishermen but essentially professionals. One might surmise then that the inference is a reliance not on their own ability but on Christ’s, not on doing the old thing, but on doing the old thing a new way and experimenting with new methods. Indeed, he told them that once they were

⁹⁷ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 400.

⁹⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1030.

⁹⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1071.

¹⁰⁰ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1032.

fishermen, but now was the time that the lessons they had learned in relationship with Jesus would make them fishers of people.

The writer, or “the one whom Jesus loves,” recognizes Jesus and excitedly reports this revelation to the other disciples. Abruptly Peter jumps in the water to rush to shore but not before securing his clothing. The last time this disciple was mentioned by name, he was running from the empty tomb. This time he is running toward Jesus as quickly as he can. Peter jumps in, “not in order to bring the catch ashore, but to get to shore first to greet ‘the Lord.’”¹⁰¹ The verb used to describe Peter clothing his nakedness prior to jumping in is more likely the verb that means to secure or tie around and avoid shame in his nakedness. This has implications for our own willingness to be vulnerable and humble ourselves in a world that expects otherwise. Interestingly, Peter is the only one who leaves the boat. The other disciples are responsible to bring the catch ashore. Meanwhile, the disciples move toward the shore with the miraculous catch in the boat.

What is the significance of 153 fish? “Various symbolic interpretations of ‘153’ have been offered (from Hebrew words that total 153 when their numerical value is reckoned, to 153 as triangular number that would have impressed ancient Pythagorean philosophers).¹⁰² What fisherman wouldn’t have counted such a miraculous catch? “The most popular solution of the conundrum among modern scholars goes back to Jerome. In his commentary on Ezekiel 47, he links the miracle of the fish with the prophet’s vision of the stream of living water that flows from the Temple to the Dead Sea, making the latter teem with life” going on to say that writers who have learned fishing “say that there

¹⁰¹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1034.

¹⁰² Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 312.

are one hundred and fifty-three species of fish.”¹⁰³ Further, though the author may have known this number was triangular, it may well simply point to the large number caught and the significance that everyone counts.

“The counting of the fish suggests the great abundance of Jesus miracle as is the case of the fish already cooking, it suggests the unlimited supply available from Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ One might deduce that obedience empowered by the Spirit equals multiplication in our current reality. Some suggest that the 153 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word for “children of God,” those whom the fishers would gather in. Jerome’s claim that there were 153 kinds of fish inferred that this was symbolic for Jesus’ lordship over all kinds of fish.¹⁰⁵ It is therefore “natural to assume that the author of John 21 saw in the miraculous catch of fish an acted parable of the mission of the apostles and of the Church after them to all nations, and its success proceeds in obedience to the risen Lord.”¹⁰⁶

“The figure 153 thus builds a bridge between the feeding miracle of the ministry and that of the Resurrection and enables the theological weight of the one to be carried over to the other. In the ancient world fish were a symbol of fruitfulness, life, and immortality. If the Eucharistic taking of bread and wine celebrated Jesus’ death, the eating of bread and fish was a celebration of his resurrection, which made fellowship

¹⁰³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 401-402.

¹⁰⁴ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, 401-402.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 583.

¹⁰⁶ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 402.

with the Lord after his death possible. So, the eucharistic meal in chapter 21 depicts an epiphany celebration of the risen Lord.”¹⁰⁷

Upon coming ashore, they see a meal of fish and bread on a carefully laid fire, and Jesus invites them to join him and to eat. “That the fish were already being cooked before they hauled in their own catch (21:9) reinforces their conviction that Jesus has complete control over nature.”¹⁰⁸ One might add that Jesus is moving ahead of us and alongside us. There is an emphasis on the careful preparation of the meal, “the fire has been laid, and fish carefully ‘laid on,’¹⁰⁹ and Jesus has prepared it. In verse 10 Jesus instructs them to “Bring some of the fish” (v. 10). This expression

is a partitive expression, literally, ‘bring from the fish.’ Here again (as in v. 9), ‘fish’ is fish to be eaten, not fish swimming in the lake (vv. 8 and 11). Is Jesus then asking for more fish to be added to those already roasting on the fire? That might seem to be the case, yet no hint is given that any of the fish in the net were ever actually cleaned and eaten. Moreover, if, as we have suggested, there is a symbolic dimension to this narrative in which fishing somehow represents the disciple’s assigned task of ‘fishing; for human beings, the thought of eating even a part of their enormous catch is incongruous, stretching the metaphor to the breaking point.¹¹⁰

Interestingly the “language Jesus uses is that of sacrifice in the Greek Bible as in ‘Cain brought an offering from the fruits of the earth.’ Jesus repeatedly taught of the need to bear fruit, to bring fruit. Jesus asks for their offering, and it is brought not to the table but to the Lord.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 404.

¹⁰⁸ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1230.

¹⁰⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1035.

¹¹⁰ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1030.

¹¹¹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1036.

The meal is ready, and Jesus invites them to “Come, have breakfast.” Jesus takes and gives the bread and the fish. In every other meal shared in this gospel, Jesus is a guest. Here Jesus is the host. There is a strong connection here with the scene in 6:11, as Jesus “took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he gave them out to those who were seated, and of the fish, as much as they wanted.”¹¹² There are Eucharistic qualities here, but perhaps more prominent is the fellowship element that Jesus is modeling once again of a shared meal among disciples.

After a nightlong failure to achieve anything, the meal reflects providential salvation: “The meal scene has three phrases—the presentation of the food (vv9-11), the invitation to eat (vv12), and the actual sharing of the food (vv13-14).” The unbroken net of large fish is ‘parabolic of the universal mission of the Church.’ The transition from night and nothingness to abundance and care evokes the providence which leads to salvation. The Bread of life (6:22-59) connection reflects the attitude of practice of eucharistia.¹¹³ The 153 fish are “meant to indicate the magnitude or fullness of the disciples’ mission and of salvation.”

This is not Jesus’s first time at the lake of Galilee (6:1). He had already performed a miracle there involving bread---and fish (see 6:5-11). Here he reveals himself to his disciples as they sit in a boat (see 6:16-21).¹¹⁴ It would seem that “they are literally fishing—but [this is] also metaphorical, for in doing what many of them have always done, the disciples now dramatize what they have been ‘sent’ to do, that is, ‘fish for

¹¹² Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 407-408.

¹¹³ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 586.

¹¹⁴ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1027.

people (see Mk 1:17/Mt 4:19//Lk 5:11), or as this Gospel puts it, forgive or retain sins (see 20:22-23).”¹¹⁵

“If the fishing incident dramatizes the disciples’ evangelistic mission, the breakfast by the lake after the extraordinary catch (vv. 12-13) dramatizes Christian worship, centering on common meals, possibly (as in 6:11) the Eucharist in particular.”¹¹⁶ “The meal of bread and fish is treated in early Christian art as an alternative expression of the eucharistic idea.”¹¹⁷ It is of interest that “only two meals are described in the Fourth Gospel, and they are both meals of bread and fish.”¹¹⁸

“John 21 presents the Church as the barque of the risen Christ, gathering many into its net, reading the story of Jesus handed on by a trustworthy witness, the Beloved Disciple, watched over by its pastor, Peter.”¹¹⁹ While we are focusing on the first fourteen verses the ones that follow seem to undergird this tone, in which “one hundred fifty-three fish are drawn into the one boat is often read as an indication of the mission of the Church to the whole world, and Jesus sharing of a meal with the disciples as a hint of the Eucharistic mission of the Christian community.”¹²⁰

The literary form further emphasizes the significance of this chapter to the reading of the entire Gospel of John. Some claim that John 20:30-31 does not close the narrative of the gospel but opens the final chapter, while others suggest that 21:1-23 is an example

¹¹⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1037.

¹¹⁶ Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 1037.

¹¹⁷ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 400.

¹¹⁸ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 402.

¹¹⁹ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 523.

¹²⁰ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 523-524.

of a final farewell literary pattern, common to literature at that time.¹²¹ Arguing from a different position but nevertheless important, one scholar, Rene Kieffer points out that the gospel both opens and closes in Galilee. Thomas Brodie seems to agree and argues that “the Gospel cannot be understood as a literary composition unless John 21 is read as an essential part of the narrative.”¹²² He further states that “a mission of daily self-giving, especially in the Church watched over by a provident risen Lord, brings the Gospel to a fitting conclusion.”¹²³ In addition, there are literary links, such as the “the theme of the darkness of the early morning” much like that of Mary’s early morning visit to the tomb and the opening lines of John that echo the creation story.

“Many words, expressions and literary peculiarities are found for the first and only time in John 21.”¹²⁴ While John 1-20 “creates a satisfactory sense of closure as a journey is completed, John 21 tells the reader the journey goes on in the presence of Jesus.”¹²⁵ There is more to the story. “A community that had already produced a Jesus-story sensed the need to give further instructions from the risen Lord to guide it as it lived in the in-between time.”¹²⁶ Both Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved ran home never to be heard from again in John 20. “Jesus must return to the story to bring Peter and the Beloved Disciple out of their homes (20:10) and to establish them

¹²¹ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 524.

¹²² Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 525.

¹²³ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 525.

¹²⁴ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 532.

¹²⁵ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 535.

¹²⁶ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 537.

respectively as shepherd (Peter) and witness (Beloved Disciple).¹²⁷ The story of Jesus had come to an end, but another story had begun. This is the new day that we are living in.

Some believe it is possible that the chapter was added by one of John's followers, a redactor who saw the need for contextualization for the church and its mission after Christ's ascension, thereby making meaning of Jesus' departure and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not only was this section added after the original gospel was written, but what is symbolized in the entire chapter points to the embodiment of and transforming power of the gospel for the world in the call to tend and feed Jesus' sheep. Jesus communicated several times prior to his death that his death would not mean the end of history, but instead its remaking or re-creating. "The new eon was proving to be different from anything that any Jew, including prophets and apocalyptic seers, had grasped." The wisdom of H. B. Swete, who long ago commented on Mark 16:7 is as follows: 'It was important to dispel at the outset any expectation of an immediate setting up of the kingdom of God in a visible form at Jerusalem.'¹²⁸

Alisson Jack compares TS Eliot's *Little Gidding* to John 21 saying this:

...Both mark multiple endings. Movement V of *Little Gidding* is the end of Eliot's *Four Quartets*: a series of poems.... John 21 is the end of John's Gospel, the end of the series of four Gospels, and close to the end of the story of Jesus' appearances on earth. Both texts offer closure, but also point to new beginnings; each struggle to reconcile the relationship between the past, present, and future. Both texts seek, self-consciously, to change the way their readers think and live.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 550.

¹²⁸ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, 399.

¹²⁹ Alison Jack, "'The Intolerable Wrestle with Words and Meanings': John 21, T. S. Eliot and the Sense of an Ending," *The Expository Times* 117, no. 12 (2006): pp. 496-501, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524606068951>, 497.

This speaks strongly to the idea of traditioned innovation and the call to do an old thing a new way. Jack goes on to say that “Movement V opens with the powerful statement that:” what we call the beginning is often the end. And to make the end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from with John 21.”¹³⁰

This pericope relates to my thesis and hypothesis in that Jesus is inviting his disciples to do an old thing (fishing) in a new way (fishing for people) for greater purposes, following his example, with a multiplication of the mission. Rather than being merely fishermen, the act of casting the net on the other side of the boat is a symbol of the old thing done a new way in being fishers of people. Furthermore, this points to the ongoing role of Jesus’s followers, empowered by the Spirit, and the symbol of the miraculous catch representative of this multiplicative work. The ending is not an ending, but rather a new beginning.

Some believe chapter 21 was added in order to address certain ecclesiastical concerns. There are intratextual connections for the implied reader, whereby the interplay between the previous narrative and that of chapter 21 invite the reader to engender new meaning.¹³¹ “At least four derivations are echoed: (1) the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the resulting scenes surrounding episode 6:1-71; (2) Peter’s Three-Fold Denial in 18:15-18, 25-27; (3) Jesus’ Washing of the Disciples’ Feet in 13:3-5, 26-38; and (4) the Parable of the Good Shepherd in 10:1-18.”¹³² Eating together and feeding others, reconciliation and forgiveness, servanthood, obedience, and humility all figure

¹³⁰ Jack, *The Expository Times*, 498.

¹³¹ Patrick E. Spencer, “Narrative Echoes in John 21: Intertextual Interpretation and Intratextual Connection - Patrick E. Spencer, 2000,” *SAGE Journals*, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0142064X0002207504>, 55.

¹³² Spencer, “Narrative Echoes in John 21,” 55.

prominently. The past, present, and future converge and “certainly images from the past, such as the fish, the fire, the shepherd are re-used and reformed and, even given new significance, discipleship is given a harder edge, and the relationship between the past, the present, and the future in the community of Jesus’s followers is redefined.”¹³³ The past, present, and future are one in his presence. This is the start of something new and unending. Here is an alteration of consciousness in the writer and the reader, the difference “between the beginning and the end of the Gospel, the series of four Gospels, the beginning of Genesis to this point. Not an end but the way.”¹³⁴

“The Evangelist consistently represents the new existence in Christ by the Spirit to be a *present* reality. Life in the kingdom of God or new creation is now, not a hope reserved for the future.”¹³⁵ Unfortunately, the church struggles to embody this in its ecclesiology and practice. “The strongest statement of the eschatological action of God in Christ in present time is John 12:31: ‘*Now* the judgment of this world takes place, *now* the prince of this world will be thrown out; and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw to myself all people.’ This emphasis on the future in the present finds a unique expression in the Evangelist’s teaching that the believer knows *resurrection* in and through Christ in the present time.”¹³⁶ I cannot help but wonder about the significance of this reality to our own practice of our faith. Where is the mutuality, the mission, the incarnation, and iteration?

¹³³ Jack, *The Expository Times*, 501.

¹³⁴ Jack, *The Expository Times*, 501.

¹³⁵ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lxxxvi.

¹³⁶ Beasley - Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36, lxxxvi.

Some argue that John's Gospel was written to supplement the other three, while others were written to interpret or correct them. Something more than knowing was needed: a new way of being. "There is ground therefore for thinking that the Fourth Gospel was written with both evangelistic and didactic aims. C. K. Barrett writes that John, "attempted and achieved the essential task of setting forth the faith once delivered to the saints in the new idiom, for the winning of new converts to the church, for the strengthening of those who were unsettled by the new winds of doctrine, and for the more adequate exposition of the faith itself."¹³⁷

The church is not meant to be the sole recipient of the gospel but instead is meant to bear witness to it in the world. "Witness does not reduce to the internal life of the church; the community is not an end in herself."¹³⁸ As worship attendance continues to decline, and that decline has only accelerated due to a global pandemic, new ways and new bodies of water are needed. In addition, we need a new shift, a new understanding of our ecclesiology. This requires moving from a structure where a solo heroic leader and/or paid professional Christian carries and dictates the mission to the priesthood of all believers, empowered and equipped by the Spirit, and sent to the world together.

In the forsaking of our self-ness and in our internal focus, decline will only continue.

"The problem here is not simply one of failing to treat one particular ecclesiastical practice. It indicates an omission that is deleterious to the whole dogmatic task many of the contemporary challenges with theology stem from the absence of mission as a theological category. How it is possible to read the New Testament

¹³⁷ Beasley - Murray, Word Biblical Commentary: John, vol. 36, lxxxix.

¹³⁸ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 293.

without reference to the missionary outpouring of the resurrection and Pentecost is a curio difficult to reconcile with even a basic reading of Scripture.”¹³⁹

Jesus’ commissioning and multiplication of mission prior to his death, resurrection, and ascension remains instructive for the church today. The church is reaping what it has sown in our lack of faithfulness and obedience to both the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbor as ourselves and the Great Commission to go make disciples. “If the community is Christian only insofar as she is missionary, if the missionary act is the concrete form of divine and human fellowship here and now, then the lack of reference to mission at every level of the teaching ministry of the church is a frightful abrogation of theological responsibility.”¹⁴⁰

The whole body of Christ, the priesthood of all believers, gifted and sent, must return to the mission of God in obedience if we are to be effective in making disciples, who make disciples. “Mission is the abundant fellowship of active participation in the very glory that is the life of God from and to all eternity. It is life in the community of reconciliation moving out in solidarity with the world in the active knowledge that God died for it, too.”¹⁴¹

FX-C are these new forms of church that provide handles for the embodiment of the mission of the church.

God’s act in reconciling the world to himself is not a second step alongside his being in and for himself. The superfluity of his act in bringing humanity, as humanity, into fellowship with himself reveals the declarative perfection of his being from and to all eternity. As there is no breach in the being and acting of

¹³⁹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 296.

¹⁴⁰ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 296.

¹⁴¹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 296-287.

God, so there can be no breach in the being and act of his community. The Christian community is a missionary community, or she is not the Christian community. A major contributor to the internal posture of the existing church is the association with a building rather than a mission to the larger community lending itself to attractional, come to us models, and a sort of apostolic amnesia. “As the community under Scripture, it is an apostolic community that reads the text in obedience to the movement of the apostles and thus in the presence of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. The community’s mediative task is one of intentional movement into the world, forsaking all those things that may appear to be her safeguard.”¹⁴²

The FX movement by its nature invites and employs the priesthood of all believers in this apostolic, evangelistic, and incarnational mission and calls us back to obedience. We need new ponds and deeper oceans in which to fish and in which Christ might continue to be revealed, the mission multiplied, and kingdom expanded. Recognizing the gifts given to all, the mission of the whole church to the whole world, and the value of its multiplication in giving itself away, it leans heavily into contextualization and shared practices, meeting people where they are on their own terms, rather than requiring them to come to us on our terms.

¹⁴² Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

A pioneering movement of laywomen

Beginning FX requires pioneers that are willing to forge new territory, crossing boundary lines both real and imagined in the landscape of the church and the world. Those that pioneer FX have entrepreneurial and often evangelistic gifts. These gifts facilitate the mission of taking the church Jesus loves closer to the people Jesus loves. The Beguines embody this reality and participate in the emergence of something new through what Len Wilson might call Christian innovation.¹⁴³

The Beguine movement that began in the late 1100s challenged many of the norms of religious life and society in its time and in many ways embodies the characteristics of the FX movement today. Both do so by calling the whole people of God to bring all their gifts to bear for the furthering of God's kingdom, maturing as apprentices of Jesus. Both note the fruit of this embodied discipleship. This is sorely needed in our current post-Christendom reality and is emblematic of the need for FX-C integrating in our current models. The FX movement is a form of traditioned innovation that catalyzes effective discipleship and encourages multiplication. In this chapter I will examine the Beguine movement and the implications of their shared life, practice, and

¹⁴³ Len Wilson, *Greater Things: The Work of the New Creation* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2021), 64.

embodiment of their faith examining common threads shared with the FX movement and the catalyzing impact of both on effective discipleship.

The Beguine movement began late in the twelfth century during a time of religious renewal and a growth in monasticism and apostolic piety. Unlike many of the other orders and movements founded by men, which had little to do with women or found them difficult to accommodate, the beguine movement was one of lay women.¹⁴⁴ Known as Beguines throughout Europe, a derogatory term given them, due to their mumbling or unclear speech, they challenged the societal structures as women living independent lifestyles. Eventually this name became a compliment due to the respect and support they gained from all segments of society.¹⁴⁵ Though they had no formal rule or vows, these women held in common a desire to live a dedicated religious lifestyle outside of a convent, instead, making room for a variety of lifestyles and contexts. In addition, they supported themselves by various means from teaching to housekeeping to working in the cloth industry. Living in the world as they did meant a greater willingness to accommodate the dominant culture and context. Their integration into specific geographic locations, which became known as Beguinages, afforded them the opportunity to overcome many of the societal norms and limitations for women while nurturing a network of support.

As women that were both devoutly religious and laity, they broke down the cultural divide between one and the other. Additionally, the movement accommodated a

¹⁴⁴ Fiona Bowie, "Self-Transcendence and the Group: The Attitude to Life of Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Beguines," *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 866 (December 1992): pp. 584-598, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1992.tb07279.x>, 587.

¹⁴⁵ Laura Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines* (Katonah, NY: BlueBridge, 2016), 12.

diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds and religious practices. Interestingly the Beguines were thought by many to go above and beyond what was “permissible” for lay people in the practice of their faith.¹⁴⁶ Despite what many believed was a defiance of societal and ecclesiastical norms, their middle way of religious life in the world provided a contextual awareness and new vitality to the church in its time.

Discipleship and growing in spiritual maturity were of the utmost importance to each community. Scripture was studied in the local vernacular or common language of the local people, a controversial practice at the time with these new translations. Innovation both in membership and organization brought about a form of community life that retained the flexibility and local variety of a movement in contrast to the uniformity of an established order. The Beguines’ daily patterns of prayer, work, and service while resembling monastic and mendicant traditions, had fluid structures that afforded much more engagement with the community at large.¹⁴⁷ The Beguines were able to bring Christian community into everyday life in contextualized ways. They were able to serve people nearby, all the while challenging the norms and expectations of the existing church.

The Beguine movement relates to my project in several ways. First, it is a lay movement. Similarly, FX seek to engage the entire priesthood of believers, whom the apostle Peter refers to in his first letter, and whom the reformer Martin Luther emphasized, deploying the whole body of Christ in being and making disciples. Second,

¹⁴⁶ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Europe: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 12.

¹⁴⁷ Glenn E. Myers, *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy: Journeying Deeper with Medieval Women of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

the Beguines were not only a community of the religiously devout, but they practiced their faith and lived it out in incarnational ways in the world that intersected with everyday people, every day. One of the key characteristics of a FX is that it is incarnational. Third, context was and is important. They did not have a uniform way of being and living and practicing their faith. Each community, and those within it, not only made room for a variety of practices, professions, and roles, they embodied a nimbleness to accommodate the dominant culture and the needs of the wider community.

The multiplication of the movement across countries and continents and its impact testifies to its resilience and effectiveness in discipleship multiplication. While Belgium, France, and Holland figure prominently in the history of this movement that spanned centuries, Spain, Germany, and Italy are also known to have records of Beguines and beguinages. “One hundred to four hundred inhabitants was common.”¹⁴⁸ One of the longest running beguinages, St. Elizabeth’s in Kortrijk, Belgium was established around 1240, only closing in 2013.¹⁴⁹ Over its centuries of existence from 50-140, Beguines lived in community there. At “St. Christophe’s in Liege, beguines numbered around one thousand members by 1253. St. Catherine Mechelen beguinage, established in 1245, grew to between 1,500 and 1,900 beguines in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.”¹⁵⁰

The Beguine movement began in response to a rigid understanding of religious life and leadership. The options for women in the Middle Ages were limited primarily to joining a monastic order or becoming a nun. Due to the growing number of men joining

¹⁴⁸ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 54.

¹⁴⁹ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 67-68.

¹⁵⁰ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 54.

monastic orders and the sociological standing of women, this became increasingly difficult over time. Historically, Benedictine and Augustinian rules flourished among the many others during this time of monastic growth, and yet according to Fiona Bowie who writes about the circumstances that led to the Beguine movement, “these Orders all found it easier to accommodate men than women and, having tried to ignore the presence of women, or to strictly limit and control their activities, there was, by the end of the twelfth century, a move to curb their enthusiasm for the monastic life and to prevent any new women’s houses becoming affiliated to these Orders.”¹⁵¹

Urban life in Europe during this time grew in population and in complexity giving birth to professional guilds that increasingly compounded matters and dominated craft professions.¹⁵² Simultaneously, Bowie shares, the loss of men to the crusades, local wars, and the priesthood meant there was an excess of marriageable women. Their exclusion from these guilds made independence for these women increasingly challenging, particularly for those who did not want to go from their father’s control to that of a husband and childbearing. For those who wanted to pursue religious life in community, joining a convent or nunnery meant a distinct disconnect from the outside world and limited expression of their faith.

Pope Gregory VII limited religious life and function holding that “only worthy priests could validly perform religious functions and had unchaste priests, as well as those who owed their office to simony, pursued as heretics. Once the idea of the ‘worthiness of the priest’ had penetrated the consciousness of the laity it proved hard to

¹⁵¹ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence,” 587.

¹⁵² Bowie, “Self-Transcendence,” 587.

eradicate.”¹⁵³ This was a contributing factor in the birth of the movement while it in turn gave rise to new monastic orders and Rules.¹⁵⁴ “The Fourth Lateran council in 1215 brought to a close the period of proliferation of new monastic and other Rules, but inadvertently strengthened the type of lay religious life typified by the beguines.”¹⁵⁵ This movement, without a set Rule, single founder, or prescribed work or lifestyle therefore “fulfilled the desire of many women for a dedicated religious life outside the enclosure of a nunnery and free of the ties of husband and family.”¹⁵⁶

The papal dispensation of 1215 from Pope Honorius, obtained by Jacques of Vitry for “women living together in chastity and poverty, doing works of Christian charity,” is also credited with starting the Beguine movement, specifically in France.¹⁵⁷ He had studied in Paris and later came to know a holy woman, Marie d’Oignies, due to her reputation. It was Marie who persuaded him to preach in the vernacular, a skill for which he became famous.¹⁵⁸ A short time after her death he authored her story, or *Vita*, which describes her own journey of “joining an already established community of women attached to a house of Augustinian Canons.”¹⁵⁹ These lay sisters of the Order were described as working mainly with the poor and infirm while performing other useful

¹⁵³ Saskia Murk-Jansen and Philip Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert: The Spirituality of the Beguines*, Preston, Vic.: Mosaic Press, 2011, 17.

¹⁵⁴ A rule of life consists of practices, postures, and rhythms that provide opportunities for the participant to grow in their relationship with God and others in an intentional way.

¹⁵⁵ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence,” 588.

¹⁵⁶ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence,” 588.

¹⁵⁷ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 24.

¹⁵⁹ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 25.

tasks within the larger community.¹⁶⁰ These lay, not professional, religious women and their ability to have a foot in both worlds activated both their own discipleship and that of those around them sparking growth and eventual multiplication. While Marie was not a beguine, her life and vita were formative in the movement.

The Laity

The lay nature of the Beguine movement in many ways dismantled and dismantles the institution of the church's hierarchical structure and professionalized clergy and embodies the "priesthood of all believers," that the Apostle Peter speaks to in his first letter, and which points significantly to the Protestant Reformation that came more than 300 years later. Alan Hirsch states in his book, *The Forgotten Ways*: "God's people appear to be more potent by far when they have more flexible structures and operate with far less by way of rigid religious institution."¹⁶¹ Hirsch argues that "it seems that over time the increasingly impersonal and centralist structures of the institution assume the roles, responsibilities, and authority that legitimately belong to the people of God."¹⁶²

Tonya Stabler Miller addresses the nuances of the movement in Paris and the beguine's impact on and accessibility to the monarchy, scholars, and a wide range of preachers. The author gives great emphasis to the interaction and collaboration over marginalization and people on "the fringe" of society. "As lay women widely recognized

¹⁶⁰ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 25.

¹⁶¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Winnipeg, Canada: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats Library, 2014), 10.

¹⁶² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 10-11.

as ‘religious,’ they called into question binary categories of religious or lay and active or contemplative.”¹⁶³ Their unusual practice prompted questions. “Beguines were thought to assume active religious roles beyond what was permissible for lay people, taking seriously what some viewed as the central mission of the beguine life: to exhort fellow Christians to live more moral, Christian lives.”¹⁶⁴ Though there were more than a few critics, “admirers such as Robert of Sorbon (d. 1274)) noted that beguines exhibited far more devotion to God than even the cloistered, since they voluntarily pursued a religious life without vows, while living in the midst of the world’s temptations.”¹⁶⁵

“Their ministry impacted education and health care, their intellectual pursuits influenced the theology and lifestyle of preachers, and certain orders of Catholic sisters had their foundation in beguine communities.”¹⁶⁶ As women began stepping outside the confines of the prevailing culture and models of church, women were able to express their faith as they felt called. This meant they could seek out and choose their own preachers, while securing informal copies of the Bible that existed in the vernacular and while experimenting with ways to embody the lives of the first apostles.¹⁶⁷ Those that did so grew intolerant of “mediocre preaching, especially from clerics whose private lives were a disaster.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 2.

¹⁶⁶ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 21.

Unfortunately, Church politics and the interplay of gaining obedience from a monarch meant that at times the pope would enact a spiritual punishment that denied lay people in their realm and/or diocese access to their clergy, potentially closing churches for months. This prevented anyone who was not clergy access to the preaching of the scriptures and the sacraments. The Beguines found this intolerable and chose to fill the void with their own proclamations both in their chapels and in the local square.¹⁶⁹

“Beguines were eager to aid in the spiritual transformation of their followers, and by preaching through performing—acting and dancing and singing—they were performing their mysticism.”¹⁷⁰ This filled a very real void, one that seems to be present still today in our clergy centric hierarchical structures.

David Fitch argues in his book *7 Practices of the Church on Mission* that, “an intensification of hierarchy in the church is a symptom of the maintenance mode. Hierarchy almost always works to take leadership out of neighborhoods and center the church in a building. It organizes church for efficiency, not for mission.”¹⁷¹ Priest Gerald Arbuckle seems to agree saying: “Little wonder that the missionary zeal within the Church has slowed down, because a closed organization discourages the apostolic creativity essential to the refounding process.”¹⁷² He claims that the church is unwilling to listen and respond to the pressing missionary need, choosing instead, to revert to

¹⁶⁹ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 125.

¹⁷¹ David E. Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 112.

¹⁷² Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 33.

pastorally inhibiting frameworks.¹⁷³ “The desire of those in power to reinforce the structures of authority and institutions which give them their power has meant that the history of spirituality has been viewed and recorded according to the extent to which it conformed to the centre and to traditional orthodoxy.”¹⁷⁴ The Beguines provided another way. Wilson refers to this as the lifecycle of innovation in his book *Greater Things*. This is “the experience of moving from initial realization of a problem to completed resolution is not linear like gears on a factory floor but organic and messy like raising a child.”¹⁷⁵

“For the beguines, always living half in the world, a greater accommodation with the dominant culture was inescapable.”¹⁷⁶ As the scriptures interpret the culture the culture in turn interprets scripture. Simultaneously, this made them vulnerable to accusations having eluded male control. “The beguine way of life provided a large number of medieval women with a model of sanctity and a means of support which enabled them to transcend the externally imposed limits on female nature and to identify with an incarnate God in whose service they lived out their vocation.”¹⁷⁷ The Beguine movement began the first, and according to Wilson, the most difficult act of innovation, doing something about the obstacles and opportunities they identified.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 33.

¹⁷⁴ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Len Wilson, *Greater Things*, 181.

¹⁷⁶ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence and the Group,” 597.

¹⁷⁷ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence and the Group,” 597.

¹⁷⁸ Len Wilson, *Greater Things*, 182.

Context

As the Beguines lived out their faith in community with one another context was important. A church that is not a contextualized expression of its community is not faithful to the gospel.¹⁷⁹ Michael Beck and Leonard Sweet assert in their book *Contextual Intelligence* that, “a gospel that is not contextualized is not faithful to the gospel. Contextualization is the embodied expression and extension of incarnation. The Word Became Flesh, Incarnation, is the ultimate contextual intelligence.”¹⁸⁰ To be contextually intelligent or even aware speaks to the significance of the circumstances that form the settings and communities we find ourselves in. The word context comes from the Latin contextus from ‘together’ + texere ‘to weave.’¹⁸¹

The Beguines embraced their context in a variety of ways, through development of a rule for each community, through vernacular theology, and through vernacular writing. “Most beguine communities lived together under a rule of life, which was not a formal legal or church document as was a monastic order’s rule. Rather, these beguine rules of life were the living tradition of a particular beguine community that had been formulated by the women themselves.”¹⁸² The community devised its own rule that defined the shared aspects of their life. Amendments could be made if found necessary.¹⁸³ “Beguines were influenced by the more moderate expressions of the Benedictine way:

¹⁷⁹ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 46.

¹⁸¹ “Our Dictionaries: Oxford Languages,” Our Dictionaries | Oxford Languages, accessed May 23, 2021, <https://languages.oup.com/dictionaries/>.

¹⁸² Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 59.

¹⁸³ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 59.

choosing a leader who evidenced pastoral concerns, making major life decisions together, and, in larger communities, choosing certain elders,” without outside interference to handle business decisions.¹⁸⁴ “The beguines yearned to embody the message of Jesus Christ as they understood it: preaching, and teaching about God’s love for all people. And imitating Jesus and his early followers, beguines fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, visited the sick and imprisoned, and buried the dead.”¹⁸⁵

Saskia Murk-Jansen, a specialist in medieval women’s mysticism focuses with detail on the four beguine writers celebrated for their pioneering use of vernacular literature to communicate the nature of God through images and metaphor based on their own experience in her book *Brides in The Desert*. Storytelling both verbally and written was significant in inviting people into the community. “Beguine writings include dictated visions, poetry and prayers, some correspondence, as well as vitae (singular vita). These are biographies but not in the modern sense—the goal of a vita is to tell a good story, much like a morality play, while demonstrating the sanctity of the vita’s subject.”¹⁸⁶ The four celebrated authors were also the subjects of these vitas that were passed from community to community. “The innovation lay in their use of the vernacular to discuss matters previously only written of in Latin, and in their appropriation of certain images and themes.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 71.

¹⁸⁶ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 80.

Beatrijs of Nazareth was a highly educated holy woman whose primary work is contained in three manuscripts and is titled *The Seven Manners (or Ways) of Loving*. This work taught readers the different ways to experience *minne* (or God understood as love) in the course of a life dedicated to God.¹⁸⁸ Mechthild of Magdeburg wrote seven books that comprised a work titled *Flowing Light of the Godhead* that is described as a sort of bridal mysticism likened to the “Song of Songs.”¹⁸⁹ Mechthild spoke to the value of a communal form to spiritual life and yet realized we must each travel to God alone, saying that a “community can provide support, comfort, protection, even self-affirmation and encouragement, but it can never be a prop for the individual path towards God.”¹⁹⁰ Truly our faith is meant to be lived in community and is far more potent when it is.

A beguine known as Hadewijch wrote five manuscripts that contained poems, letters, and visions primarily focused on how the creature can resemble God only in human suffering and that to suffer with God’s humanity and to rejoice with God’s divinity is a single rejoicing.¹⁹¹ Finally, Marguerite Porete authored *The Mirror of Simple Souls* that made the case for the central annihilation of the soul by the abolition of the personal will.¹⁹² Marguerite was burned at the stake, not for the writing which did contain some heresy, but because she continued to disseminate it after its banning.

“Einstein once noted that the kind of thinking that will resolve the world’s problems must be of a different order from the kind of thinking that created those

¹⁸⁸ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 59-62.

¹⁸⁹ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 65-78.

¹⁹⁰ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence and the Group,” 584-585.

¹⁹¹ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 69-74.

¹⁹² Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 75-78.

problems in the first place.”¹⁹³ Beguine texts in many cases were a new way of doing an old thing, or are a form of traditioned innovation, and are significant Murk-Jansen asserts, in that they “represent some of the earliest examples of vernacular literature” and include some of the earliest and finest examples of vernacular theology.¹⁹⁴ These vernacular writings had the ability to overcome the limited reach and understanding of religious texts meeting people in their everyday language and experience. Notable features of Beguine writing are “their use of paradox, metaphor and image language, all of which are effective, unlike the systematic theology which relies on rational explanation.”¹⁹⁵

Writing in the local vernacular was innovative. “Religious writing in the vernacular was more than translation but rather a “new creation revealing a struggle with the boundaries of language and of theology itself.”¹⁹⁶ Many were rewritten in some way. This afforded the commoner access to teaching and writing in an accessible form. “A different and wider audience was addressed by texts in the vernacular than that addressed by traditional monastic and scholastic theological texts.

It is remarkable how the earliest development of theological texts in the vernacular is marked by mystic texts. This is important evidence of the laity’s desire for greater spiritual inwardness than their traditional role in the Church had allowed.”¹⁹⁷ The implicit and pastoral nature of the texts emphasizes a practical Christianity and “map out

¹⁹³ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 14.

¹⁹⁴ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 34.

¹⁹⁶ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 41

¹⁹⁷ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 41-42.

the way of life under God.”¹⁹⁸ These vernacular writings and the accessible, flexible, and nimble nature of the movement accommodated “women of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds pursuing a wide spectrum of religious practices.”¹⁹⁹

Incarnation

Eugene Petersen’s *The Message* translation of John 1:14 says it all: “The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.”²⁰⁰ The God-man Jesus took on flesh, and so too should our faith be embodied. Laura Swan, who has written prolifically on the history of spiritual lives of women, unpacks with great specificity the spiritual practices of the Beguines in the context of their time and the legacy and influence on church history they left in her book *The Wisdom of the Beguines*. Similarly, Murk-Jansen notes the accessibility the movement afforded, “The development of the Beguine movement was part of the desire to ‘democratise’ religion. The desire to bring God to the people, into the marketplace, flowed from the dawning realization that Christianity was properly a way of life accessible to all, not just a series of rites performed by an inner circle of initiates.”²⁰¹ This echoes what is often shared in the FX movement that claims to take the church Jesus loves closer to the people Jesus loves.

Key to the beguine life was a practice of presence in the marketplace and with the marginalized, from children, to the homeless, to the sick and dying. “It is only through being present to the other, what I have called kinship, that God changes the world. In this

¹⁹⁸ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 119.

¹⁹⁹ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 10.

²⁰⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004).

²⁰¹ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 113.

relational space with the marginalized and hurting, God's authority and presence in Jesus Christ becomes real and can be tended to," states Fitch.²⁰²

The spiritual lives of the Beguines were not limited to an inward life and far from a mental ascent. "Beguines developed a spirituality that was both in and of the world, not separated from it."²⁰³ In *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, Alan Kreider would seem to support this when he quotes Cyprian saying, "Beloved brethren, we are philosophers not in words but in deeds; we exhibit our wisdom not by our dress, but by truth; we know virtues by their practice rather than through boasting of them; we do not speak great things but we live them."²⁰⁴ Fiona Bowie, whose work focused on Beguines in the 13th and 14th centuries, highlights their understanding of the incarnation and the implications that God is present in our neighbors, moving them to serve. They lived by the work of their own hands and were thought of favorably by the Franciscans for not burdening the world with their needs.²⁰⁵ Hadewijch, one of the four prominent beguine writers, wrote extensively about the incarnation, our own humanity providing a place of connection to that of Christ and his suffering while also speaking to Christ's redemption of the flesh in his own flesh.²⁰⁶

²⁰² David E. Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 67.

²⁰³ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 11.

²⁰⁴ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 13.

²⁰⁵ Bowie, "Self-Transcendence and the Group," 589.

²⁰⁶ Bowie, "Self-Transcendence and the Group," 595.

“The incarnation also implies that God is present in those around us, so that to truly love God, one must serve one’s neighbor.”²⁰⁷ This conveys the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace, God working in our lives before and whether we even can recognize or name it. “Mission first and foremost is an activity of God. —The activity of this missional God means that the church does not engage in mission and ask God to bless it. God engages in mission and asks the church to join him.”²⁰⁸ The church is the visible representation of Christ, his body, on the planet. “When the church threads its way through the multiple segments of society, its life and witness can begin to show what these contexts could be like under the rule of Christ.”²⁰⁹

Much like the Beguines sought to embody the gospel in all areas of their lives, Beck and Sweet assert, “We exist in relationship with the world ‘God so loved,’ not separate from it. The gospel is made incarnate in all the diverse cultures of the world. The gospel is not intended to turn all the cultures of the world into Christian cultures.”²¹⁰ Instead, as it becomes incarnate in different cultures it becomes something new.²¹¹ Likewise, this is what leads to a truly contextualized community of faith. “In an incarnational model, you love your way into the new; you don’t work your way out of the old. You rise to the future more by exercising the promises of the past than by appraising and appraising the guises and disguises of the past.”²¹² Love forgets itself and steps out of

²⁰⁷ Bowie, “Self-Transcendence and the Group,” 595.

²⁰⁸ Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 144.

²⁰⁹ Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology*, 190.

²¹⁰ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 49.

²¹¹ Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 149.

²¹² Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*, 50.

the comfortable and predictable norms into what makes sense for the people God and the world God so loves. Jesus's incarnation speaks to the value of vulnerability as we live as a servant of the gospel.

It is striking how the Beguines personified this. "Beguines were heavily involved in the development and promotion of 'incarnational piety' and 'affective devotion.' They embodied their prayer and devotion, seeking to emotionally enter into their experience of prayer."²¹³ Swan seems to agree saying, "Wishing to teach fellow lay seekers a path to an intimate relationship with God, beguines first and foremost taught by example."²¹⁴

The Beguine movement has many points of connection to the work of the FX movement in mobilizing disciples and therefore catalyzing effective discipleship. I have chosen to focus primarily on the priesthood of all believers, dismantling of hierarchical boundary lines between laity and professional clergy, contextualization, and the incarnational, embodied faith and mission to which we are called. The life and practice of the Beguines has much to teach us today. "The voices of these women and the spirituality they forged out of their circumstances have rested unheard for centuries. The voices of theology have been the male-dominated voices of the ecclesiastical hierarchies as they sought to shout each other down over the centuries since the Reformation."²¹⁵

Murk-Jansen asserts, the Beguines left a legacy that can be traced, though faintly, up to the Reformation and beyond. The Beguines seem to say that embodying a contextualized faith that understands the sent-ness of all of God's people, not just a select

²¹³ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 88.

²¹⁴ Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, 97.

²¹⁵ Murk-Jansen and Sheldrake, *Brides in the Desert*, 115.

few, is the way forward. “As the community under Scripture, it is an apostolic community that reads the text in obedience to the movement of the Spirit. The community’s mediative task is one of intentional movement into the world, forsaking all those things that may appear to be her safeguard.”²¹⁶ For the Beguines those safeguards might have been cloistered living, financial support from the church, and professionalized clergy. Alan Roxburgh spells out the implications: “This is the context in which the new maps emerge. Leaders are no longer CEOs with overarching vision and mission statements tied to a centralized plan built around key programs. They are cultivators of an environment in which God’s future emerges because that future lies within the people who comprise the congregation.”²¹⁷

The life and practice of the Beguines speaks powerfully to the FX movement and its value in a post-Christendom context. “Fresh expressions of church are valued not mainly as means of advancing pastoral, social and ecological agendas, but as ways of communicating with post-Christian people ‘to enable them to become committed communities of followers of Jesus.’”²¹⁸ Lesslie Newbigin seems to agree saying, “The church is to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of this divine purpose by taking Jesus into all settings of life now.”²¹⁹ In addition, “New ecclesial communities make the church present publicly in all the cavities of life.”²²⁰ The institutional church, one might observe,

²¹⁶ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

²¹⁷ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 180.

²¹⁸ Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology*, 154.

²¹⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, “What Is ‘A Local Church Truly United’?” *The Ecumenical Review* 29, no. 2 (1977): pp. 115-128, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1977.tb02449.x>.

²²⁰ Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology*, 190.

is increasingly internally focused forgetting its sentness and reinforcing its frame rather than renewing its function afresh which furthers its lack of effective discipleship. “The church is called to serve the world through acts of mercy and justice, by proclaiming the gospel and by modeling the kingdom. It can do this through Christian communities that draw near to people in their ordinary lives and engage with their agendas in a pinpointed manner.”²²¹

This is a change in basic assumptions for the “come to us” attractional models of church, which have become the norm. “Inviting people into an accessible community often requires the church to create new communities, which are the right shape for the people they seek to serve.”²²² FX of church are new communities of faith created primarily for people that are not yet a part of any church. The questions I am left asking because of this research are many. What circumstances move people out of institutional malaise and decline to the fringe? How do we preach and teach about the priesthood of all believers in a way that invites people to claim this mission and authority? Where are we perpetuating the rigidity and inward focus of the institution? Why are so many in the West accustomed to a disembodied, contemplative faith to the detriment of following the incarnational witness of Jesus? What are the postures, practices, and rhythms that might re-engage believers? How can the church regain its outward, missional, and apostolic posture? These are just some of the questions I address in my project.

²²¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology*, 190.

²²² Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology*, 151-152.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Missional Ecclesiology

The sentiment has been attributed to many, its origins are uncertain and yet it rings true, “God does not have a mission for the church but a church for God’s mission.” The nature and structure of the Christian church, or ecclesiology, has grown to be internal, hierarchical, and led by a professionalized clergy. The UMC in North Georgia is an example of this. This Christendom mode has dramatically impacted the effectiveness and ability to make disciples who make disciples in a post-Christendom reality. Alan Hirsch seems to agree, “If we fail to change the primary paradigm of the church, then nothing will change! So we must go to the issues of ecclesial mode, to the very way in which we configure the system from which we operate.”²²³ In this chapter I will focus on the theology of mission-based ecclesiology as foundational to the effective discipleship through FX.

Organizing the church around God’s mission is integral to effective discipleship.

“Ecclesiology is a theological discipline that seeks to understand and define the church and missional ecclesiology does this from a missional point of view where the Church is understood as a community of witness, called into being and equipped by God, and sent into the world to testify to and participate in Christ’s

²²³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 61.

work. It is the discussion of what the church is called to be and to do-its nature, its purpose, its hopes, its structures and practices.”²²⁴

Cornelius Niemandt emphasizes this in an article written on trends in missional ecclesiology. How the church understands itself and its primary role are formative. “The basis of the argument is that ecclesiology follows mission-the church does what it is and then organizes what it does.”²²⁵

Our current ecclesiology is challenged by a world that no longer is shaped by Christendom. As a result, that church continues to battle decline with solutions that delivered results in the past with diminishing returns in the present and for the future. What follows is a brief overview of some of the factors that both led to Christendom models of church, as well as some that have moved this mode forward through time to where we are today. There are a variety of implications for the future of the church as we reorient ourselves toward a more mission-based ecclesiology. Finally, I will emphasize how FX fits into our embrace and practice of a missional ecclesiology in making disciples who make disciples, catalyzing effective discipleship.

The mission of God is the mission of the church as God’s primary agent. “The church has come into being because of mission and mission characterizes the whole as a result of mission and mission characterizes the whole of Christian existence. Its missional existence is visible in the fact that it is an apostolic community in active movement towards the world.”²²⁶

²²⁴ Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, “*Trends in Missional Ecclesiology*,” HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies 68, no. 1 (November 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1198>, 1.

²²⁵ Niemandt, *Trends in Missional Ecclesiology*, 3.

²²⁶ Niemandt, *Trends in Missional Ecclesiology*, 3.

Ecclesiology in its current form, minus the mission, perpetuates the disconnect and has led to decline. It does so in the following ways: an inward focus that is body centric and individualistic, neglecting the gifts of the entire body focused on a common outward oriented mission, and the inability to deploy the gifts together in the interest of the whole body to growing up into full maturity (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). Additionally, this inward focus is accentuated in all efforts to preserve the institution and tends to prioritize the gifts of the pastor or shepherd and teacher. In turn this diminishes the gifts of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists that are so needed to take the church Jesus loves to the people Jesus loves outside of our institutional models of church.

The Spirit is the gift given to the body as it is sent to the world empowered to continue the mission of Christ and do even greater things (John 14:1-12). “The church is the pneumatologically enabled union that exists between the incarnate Christ and the human community of the church as Christ’s body.”²²⁷ Further, Niemandt shares that, a missional ecclesiology dismantles ideas that the church is a building or an institution. Rather, it is argued, the church is a “community of witnesses called into being and equipped by God and sent into the world to testify and participate in Christ’s work.”²²⁸ Theologian Karl Barth believed that “the true Church can never be limited to the confines of an institution.”²²⁹

²²⁷ Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 156.

²²⁸ Niemandt, *Trends in Missional Ecclesiology*, 3.

²²⁹ Wessel Bentley, *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 28.

“The idea of ‘mission’ is carried throughout the New Testament by 206 references to ‘sending’.”²³⁰ Moreover, “the main Greek verb for ‘to send’ is *apostellein*.”²³¹ Dana Robert notes that...

the most famous biblical passage used by Christians to encourage each other to spread the word about Jesus’s life, work, and defeat of death occurred when after the resurrection Jesus ordered the gathered disciples to, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19-20). The book of John phrased Jesus’ post-resurrection counsel to the disciples with the words, ‘as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you’ (John 20:21). Despite intermittent opposition from Roman authorities, from Jewish religious leaders, and from adherents of Greek and Roman gods, early followers of ‘The Way’ organized themselves into gathered communities called *ekklesia* or churches. Dozens of different biblical expressions were used to describe the public witness or missionary existence of the *ekklesia*, such as ‘light of the world,’ ‘salt of the earth,’ and ‘city on a hill.’ Churches therefore were both the products of mission and the organizational network behind further spread of the message.²³²

Still, the structure of the institution seems to hinder rather than help the mission.

Interestingly, Callum Brown attributes the decline of the church to the changes we have experienced in society while others might argue that society at large changed and yet the church failed to.²³³ Sociologist “Manuel Castells contends that the world is reconfiguring round a series of networks strung across the globe based on advanced communication technologies. Hierarchies are shifting to networks, and this is

²³⁰ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 11.

²³¹ James M. Phillips, et al., “Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission,” in *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honor of Gerald H. Anderson* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 176.

²³² Robert, *Christian Mission*, 11.

²³³ Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 127.

transforming every aspect of social existence.”²³⁴ Within hierarchical organizations, structures are simple to manage; however, organizations are growing to be too complex for procedures and systems to be determined in advance. This indicates the need for fresh approaches to structures and systems that are more contextual and nuanced.²³⁵

Fresh approaches are what FX is all about. The FX movement began as a response to the decline in the institutional church in the UK and an attentiveness to the Holy Spirit that continues the missional outward thrust of God’s inbreaking kingdom. I contend that a church that engages in forming fresh expressions recaptures the mission and engages all the gifts of the body as disciples are commissioned and deployed to make disciples who in turn make disciples. This outward thrust, shared leadership, and priesthood of believers’ culture, addresses the internal, hierarchical, and professionalized clergy system that has led to the decline and in some cases even greater rigidity of the institution.

Not all agree as to the mission first approach of FX. The authors of *For the Parish* argue that FX lack sound methodology and adequate theology while encouraging individualism. This is problematic, they argue, because language and belief can only first be understood as a part of a community. Further, they claim that FX make mission that primary goal to the detriment or even dismissal of salvation which is incompatible with Anglican ecclesiology.²³⁶

²³⁴ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 129.

²³⁵ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 129.

²³⁶ Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish a Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2011).

While decline in church attendance, participation, and multiplication are nothing new, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have both accelerated the decline and provided an opportunity to shift the paradigm.²³⁷ While institutional models have majored in attractional forms of getting people into a building, “the COVID-19 situation provides the church a perfect opportunity to shift from being ‘inward-looking’ to a community that is formed and equipped by God to partake in God’s work in the world.”²³⁸ Likewise, Beukes continues: “The church’s missional understanding is not about getting more people into the church or making the church entertaining, so that it could attract more people, but it is rather to send the church into the world, to transform and change the world and to portray God’s glory.”²³⁹ Though individuals make up the body of Christ in the church, “the individual believer as church is called to be active outside the church or as they specifically say, ‘in the marketplace’. There is an increasing awareness that the great commission can only be addressed successfully in the spaces where people spend most of their lives.”²⁴⁰

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to *make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*, and yet this fails to include an integral direction in the Great Commission, “GO!” (Matthew 28:19).²⁴¹ The result has been a progressively

²³⁷ “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” ChurchLeaders, July 19, 2019, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html>.

²³⁸ Jacques W. Beukes, “To Be or Not to Be? A Missional and Practical Theological Perspective on Being Church without Walls Amidst Coronavirus Disease 2019: A Challenge or an Opportunity?,” *HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6115>, 3.

²³⁹ Beukes, “To Be or Not to Be,” 4.

²⁴⁰ Beukes, “To Be or Not to Be,” 6.

²⁴¹ Italics added for emphasis.

inward facing, academic understanding of discipleship focused far more on orthodoxy than orthopraxy. We have forgotten our mission, and our ecclesiology has been negatively impacted. Moreover, we have diminished or forfeited the gift of the Spirit given for this mission.

As our institutional and Christendom shaped form have led to a greater internal focus and further rigidity in the pursuit of self-preservation, we have experienced the opposite. These forms are more internal, attractional, professionalized, and have academic ideas about disciple making. Alternatively, FX are nimble, movemental, incarnational, contextual, and missional. While they are formational in nature, they simultaneously challenge our ideas about being and making disciples. In the FX movement, there is no classicism of clergy professionals. The priesthood of all believers and the expectation of mission and multiplication is implied. This arrangement shifts the framework of the church so that outward, missional, multiplication can take place.

Ecclesiology, its form and our practice, has been impacted by a number of factors in history. Constantine's conversion and adoption of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire led to the Christendom model, yet even that changed over time. Vatican II, 1962-1965, profoundly changed structures and practices of the church. "The ecclesiology of Vatican II, shifted to one of emphasis more than substance and of rhetoric more than doctrine. The image of the people of God developed in such a way as to imply institutional and hierarchical structures. Laity are active participants but not empowered to determine the policies or doctrines of Christ."²⁴² While a move in the right direction, more than lip service is needed.

²⁴² Avery Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 50, no. 3 (1989): pp. 419-442, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398905000301>, 429-430.

Leonardo Boff addresses this gap and its evolution in *Ecclesiogenesis*. Though Vatican II shifted the ecclesiology of the church it made essential the gospel, the Eucharist, and a bishop of apostolic succession for a church to be a church. Experience, however, looked different in that bishops and priests were not always available and yet base communities of faith, hope, and charity, continued to operate as local churches.²⁴³ Historically the celebration of the Eucharist and the one who would lead evoked questions, stipulations, and resulted in adaptations to ecclesiology.²⁴⁴ Boff calls the gospel community the organism of salvation, which would seem to challenge critics Davison and Milbanks' ideas about FX. Instead, I would integrate these perspectives. The organism of salvation, the church, enfolds new members into the body as it moves together on mission with God.

“Karl Rahner’s basic understanding of the Church was closely correlated with his vision of salvation history, with Jesus Christ as the culmination of that history. The Church perpetuates in time God’s definitive self-gift in history.”²⁴⁵ Rahner, a German Jesuit priest that lived from 1904-1984 takes issue with the institutional realities of the church. “In his ecclesiological essays after the council Rahner become more critical of the Church as institution...The Church of the future, Rahner contended, should be open, democratized, and declericalized.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent The Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), chap. 6.

²⁴⁴ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent The Church*, chap. 2.

²⁴⁵ Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 431.

²⁴⁶ Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 433.

Hans Kung, a Swiss Catholic (1928-2021), seems to agree emphasizing that “the Church is in fact a reversal of the clerical, juridicist, and triumphalist ecclesiologies of the preconciliar period.”²⁴⁷ Dreyer argues in his article on the priesthood of believers that this legacy of the reformation seems to have been forgotten, saying, “the limited attention given to the priesthood of believers in reformed ecclesiologies, confessions and church orders is challenged in the current discourse on ecclesiology, especially by theologians working in the field of missional ecclesiology.”²⁴⁸ This outward thrust is integral to discipleship. “As the Body fulfils its role, so we find the cycle continues, and increasing numbers of people respond and become part of the Body of Christ called “The Church.”²⁴⁹

“If the Church’s primary role is mission (its testimony to the world of its Lord), then it must be true that the church needs to exist in relationship with different groups in order to make mission possible.”²⁵⁰ The relational and incarnational, missional and formational nature of the “great commission mission” that we have been invited to has unfortunately been in many cases diminished to collecting supplies and writing checks. David Fitch seems to agree saying, “We should be careful whenever we distribute resources at a distance, apart from the space of being present. In terms of money, the larger the amount of money that flows to the poor apart from a relationship, the more

²⁴⁷ Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 434.

²⁴⁸ Wim A. Dreyer, “The Priesthood of Believers: The Forgotten Legacy of the Reformation,” *HTS Theologesie Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6021>, 1.

²⁴⁹ Bentley, *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology*, 28.

²⁵⁰ Bentley, *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology*, 26.

likely the givers are supporting systems that caused the injustice in the first place.”²⁵¹

Every church and people have a context. In addition, Bentley shares, “Barth’s ecclesiology, focusing on mission, was not limited to Barth’s context, but can be used as a model that will enrich the ministry of the Church in the 21st century.”²⁵² Relationships, incarnational mission and attentiveness to context impact practice.

Donald MacGavran, largely touted as the father of the church growth movement, argues that the bond of relationship was the bridge over which faith has been passed in his book *Bridges of God*.²⁵³ When our churches rather than the relationships prompted by the Great Commission become the end point, we miss the point. MacGavran addresses the model of the Mission Station Church as problematic when “the mission station becomes an end in itself, instead of a means to the discipling of peoples.”²⁵⁴ One may have heard it said that the gospel comes to us on the way to someone else. “Christward movements of people are the supreme goal of missionary efforts.”²⁵⁵ John Flett concurs saying, “This apostolic existence is the Christian community’s concrete existence, that is, the being of the church and her act coincide in such a way that her community existence anticipates her calling in the world, and her act is the actualization of her being. One consequence of mission’s distillation from the life of the church is its reduction to a peculiar occupation undertaken by spiritual elites alongside which the community lives a

²⁵¹ David E. Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 65.

²⁵² Bentley, *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology*, 37.

²⁵³ Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 25.

²⁵⁴ McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*, 59.

²⁵⁵ McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*, 81.

nonmissionary existence. A disjunction forms between the act of proclamation and the life of the community.”²⁵⁶

Our Christendom modes illustrate this in our inherited models of church. “In the current model of the local church believers gather for worship, during which they are drawn into and shaped by the Christian story. Then they are sent into the world to witness as a dispersed but godly community. Christians gather for worship and disperse as individuals.”²⁵⁷ In contrast, Jurgen Moltmann distinguishes the gathered community as one that comes together for the sake of world and sacrament and the dispersed church as ‘Christians in the world’ joining God in his kingdom work.²⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the “felt experience of most Christians is that having gathered for worship, they go into the rest of life as individuals.”²⁵⁹ God is triune however and does not model a mission done individually but one done in community. Flett quotes Barth in saying that Jesus would not be who he is if he lacked his community and if this community lacked a missionary character.²⁶⁰ God is a sending God. God sent God’s Son. God sends the Spirit. The Son sends us together. Similarly, when Jesus sends out the seventy-two on mission he does so in pairs (Luke 10:1).²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 33.

²⁵⁷ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 181.

²⁵⁸ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 181.

²⁵⁹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 181.

²⁶⁰ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 218.

²⁶¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 184.

“If we want to rely on history to discern the church’s identity, it is somewhat arbitrary to focus on the church’s interior rather than the mission.”²⁶² As a community with a missionary character the church must necessarily have an external or exterior focus. “The question this begs in post-Christendom is what level of belonging is needed to sustain incarnational discipleship in alien cultures.”²⁶³ We cannot assume that the institutional ecclesiology will be effective in other contexts any more than it is in ours as the world changes around us. “Many aspects of inherited church were designed for a different context in which churches were socially and culturally central. Marginal post-Christendom churches need not struggle to maintain programs designed for a Christendom culture.”²⁶⁴ Though these technical solutions and approaches were effective in a Christendom reality, they are far less so in a post-Christendom one. “When the church threads its way through the multiple segments of society, its life and witness can begin to show what these contexts could be like under the rule of Christ.”²⁶⁵

“We need each other’s help to detect the persistence of the Christendom mindset and the pervasive influence of consumerism.”²⁶⁶ It is possible, Murray argues, to promote evangelism and social action under the banner of missional church without disavowing the Christendom legacy.²⁶⁷ “Mission is not the agenda item-it is the agenda.”²⁶⁸ The

²⁶² Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 207.

²⁶³ Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2012), 20.

²⁶⁴ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 20.

²⁶⁵ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 190.

²⁶⁶ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 65.

²⁶⁷ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 136.

²⁶⁸ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 137.

Anglican Church, a pioneer partner in the birthing the FX movement, has discovered that FX “are not only complementing the inherited parochial model with fresh expressions of church but allowing their missiology to shape their ecclesiology.”²⁶⁹ Tim Dakin writes in *Mission-Shaped Questions* that “those caught up in the dynamics of God’s mission become the shape and the shapers of the Church.”²⁷⁰

Especially pervasive in Western culture is consumerism and a pursuit of comfort. This has an unfortunate impact on the church. “A pattern through church history is that proclaiming the gospel becomes less prevalent whenever the church gets comfortable in society. No longer seeing the world as outside of Christ’s reign, the church turns its focus to teaching. It turns to deepening the knowledge of its parishioners. This is what Christendom does to the church.” This is what Fitch calls the maintenance mode of the church.²⁷¹ He further asserts, “I would argue, an intensification of hierarchy in the church is a symptom of the maintenance mode. Hierarchy almost always works to take leadership out of neighborhoods and center the church in a building. It organizes the church for efficiency, not for mission.”²⁷² This structure and organization though efficient is ineffective. “When we forfeit mutuality and tending to the presence of Christ among leadership, we forfeit the practice of the fivefold ministry as well.”²⁷³

Across church history, many attempts have been made to recover the priesthood of all believers and the fivefold gifts, from the monastics, to the Brethren and Anabaptists

²⁶⁹ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 142.

²⁷⁰ Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 143.

²⁷¹ Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission*, 56.

²⁷² Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission*, 112.

²⁷³ Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission*, 112.

to John Wesley's societies, "true renewal, it seems, always starts with local communities of pluralized leadership fostering grassroots movements."²⁷⁴ The New Testament church sparked a people movement as the gospel was passed from one person to the next creating communities as it moved. In contrast, we largely associate the church in its nature and function as an institution, buildings, denominations, and professional clergy. This should not be confused with New Testament ecclesiology.

When we understand church in an institutional form and structure, we lose sight of the movemental nature of the body of Christ.²⁷⁵ This is largely due to the nearly overnight shift associated with Constantine's conversion that made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. "What was largely an illegal underground people movement was now given money, status, power and legitimacy."²⁷⁶

Addressing the context that birthed the FX movement, Ryan Bolger emphasizes the "substantial cultural change undergone by Western societies, where postmodernity interfaces with post-Christendom. The culture of the West has grown further and further apart from the culture of the church. The most obvious evidence of this in England is church attendance."²⁷⁷ Contrary to Ross Douthat's thoughts on America's religious decline in his book *Bad Religion*, England, some might say, is from our future, as we in the US often experience similar cultural shifts. "It is little wonder that our precommitments to the Christendom mode of church and thinking restrict us to past

²⁷⁴ Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission*, 113.

²⁷⁵ Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 32.

²⁷⁶ Hirsch and Ferguson, *On the Verge*, 33.

²⁷⁷ Ryan K. Bolger, *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 332.

successes and give us no real solutions for the future. We always seem to default to its preconceived answers.”²⁷⁸ The decline we are experiencing today thrusts us into the same default mode. We default to technical solutions rather than adapting, trying to perfect or at least do better what we have always done rather than trying new approaches.

“Seldom in these assessments do we hear a call for a radical rethink about the actual mode of the church’s engagement—the way it perceives and shapes itself around its core tasks.”²⁷⁹ There is much to be found in our Wesleyan roots. “Methodism is a classic example of a renewal movement within Christianity, a fresh expression of Christianity, which was frozen out by the rigidity of ecclesiastical structures and the unbendingness of tradition.”²⁸⁰

Our attractional, institutional forms of church put a great deal of emphasis on the Sunday morning worship experience and often little else. There are weaknesses in this church centric, worship-first approach in our church planting models. This can minimize the impact of a broader agenda of witnessing to the coming kingdom. “The plant does not emerge through explicit acts of kindness, justice and ecological care. The plant is a means to a kingdom end, but much of the end is not fundamental to the means. The means are the witness to the kingdom.”²⁸¹ These church growth models are weakened by the fact that they are not easily replicable and often require a paid leader and a large team,

²⁷⁸ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 43.

²⁷⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 43.

²⁸⁰ Steven J. L. Croft, *Mission-Shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today's Church* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2010), 65.

²⁸¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 40.

therefore making them specialist activities rather than an ecclesial norm.²⁸² Evidence suggests that these models reach lapsed church goers and those with some church background, rather than the unchurched.

In the FX journey, listening, loving, and serving first creates a contextual response to the local community by the leading of the Spirit.²⁸³ Mike Moynagh differentiates between what he defines as causation and effectuation strategies with our current models of church falling in the causation category and FX falling into the effectuation category. He identifies 4 principles in starting new things and outlines the implications of each. “With causation, entrepreneurs define their objectives as a form of prediction into a future with known risks.”²⁸⁴ In contrast, effectuation uses “short-term experiments to identify opportunities within a unpredictable future.”²⁸⁵ Causation entrepreneurs “estimate capital required, calculate their likely return on investment, and decide whether risk is worth taking.”²⁸⁶ Those that use effectuation “believe that the future is too unpredictable to allow such a calculation.”²⁸⁷ With causation there is an analysis of the market, competitors, and strategy created with timelines and targets. With effectuation, everything proceeds experimentally, and strategic partnerships are created to reduce uncertainty, minimize costs, and provide feedback. As the work is done, objectives are clarified.²⁸⁸ In causation, entrepreneurs know their destination, while with effectuation,

²⁸² Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 41.

²⁸³ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 57.

²⁸⁴ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 60.

²⁸⁵ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 60.

²⁸⁶ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 60.

²⁸⁷ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 60.

²⁸⁸ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 61.

entrepreneurs exploit the opportunities that emerge along the way.²⁸⁹ In a recent conversation with Elaine Heath she shared a helpful alternative to strategic planning. Rather than a plan that is less than malleable, she suggests strategic intent that creates space for iteration while continually returning to the “why.”

Moynagh argues that “the coming kingdom contains possibilities for natural and human flourishing. Imagining these possibilities creates dissatisfaction with the current state of the world. Through the Spirit, this dissatisfaction breeds a desire to bring the kingdom closer. Ecclesial entrepreneurs are one of the Spirit’s vehicles for hope.”²⁹⁰ While managers maintain the status quo and favor stability, entrepreneurs are dissatisfied with the status quo and work to transform it. “Fresh expressions embody an alternative story. The narrative has a pragmatic element— ‘fresh expressions are a solution to the problem of church decline.’”²⁹¹ Incarnation is the central theological component that supports the pragmatic theme in the fresh expressions narrative.²⁹² This was also addressed in Frost and Hirsch’s *Shaping of Things to Come*. Here attractional church and incarnational church are differentiated where, like Jesus, his body is called to go out to where people are and be with them.

“Mission first and foremost is an activity of God.”²⁹³ God’s activity is what we are invited to participate in as the mission of the church. “The activity of this missional God means that the church does not engage in mission and ask God to bless it. God

²⁸⁹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 61.

²⁹⁰ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 63.

²⁹¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 108.

²⁹² Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 109.

²⁹³ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 144.

engages in mission and asks the church to join him.”²⁹⁴ Jesus “demonstrates the essence of mission-going out to others in self-giving generosity.”²⁹⁵ Likewise, “if mission is fundamental to the character of God and has the nature of self-giving to others, there can never have been a ‘time’ when God’s heart was not shaped by mission. God has been missional from all eternity.”²⁹⁶

As has been said previously, we are sent by a missionary God. God is a sending God, and God’s nature within God’s self is sending, who as Son and Spirit, are sent to the world.²⁹⁷ “Only as God uses the church as an instrument of his own missionary activity can the church’s act be properly considered mission.”²⁹⁸ Therefore, “since mission originates in God, the onus falls on the Christian community to maintain and propagate missions according to God’s will.”²⁹⁹ This is not the role of a small group of people within each body but the whole body together. “The world loved by God is the object of his mission, and its final reconciliation is coincidental with the final revelation of the kingdom of God.”³⁰⁰ Flett goes on to say, “If she relinquishes her missionary existence, the church becomes mere contingency. She submits to that natural desire of all

²⁹⁴ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 144.

²⁹⁵ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 144.

²⁹⁶ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 146-147.

²⁹⁷ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 36.

²⁹⁸ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 37.

²⁹⁹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 37.

³⁰⁰ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 51.

institutions to become content with the status quo, locating her identity in the givens of local language, rituals, customs, stories, and even in her ethnicity.”³⁰¹

As the church orders its life and is formed by the mission, the mission is the agenda and the framework for the community to act. “Mission is something the Christian community must receive in order to be, and any attempt to seize control of this act threatens her being.”³⁰² This is what constitutes life together as the body sent to the world. “Mission cannot be something the community possesses, for it is not the community in isolation. It is this living fellowship in which the divine retains the initiative, and the community lives in response. This ordered identity means that the community must be active by the Spirit in following her Lord into the world.”³⁰³

“The Christian community is a missionary community, or she is not the Christian community,” emphasizes Flett.³⁰⁴ “The community’s mediative task is one of intentional movement into the world, forsaking all those things that may appear to be her safeguard.”³⁰⁵ A life of self-donation in exchange for one of self-preservation. “The community learns what new forms of obedience the Spirit requires only as she presses to a fuller understanding of the kingdom. As Jesus Christ learned obedience once through the things that he suffered (Heb. 5:8), so his community learns obedience through her prophetic calling into the world for which God is. In dogmatic parlance, the church exists

³⁰¹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 73.

³⁰² Flett, *The Witness of God*, 73.

³⁰³ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 291.

³⁰⁴ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

³⁰⁵ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

only as *ecclesia semper reformanda*.” The church in its apostolic and evangelistic act must always be reforming and renovating herself.³⁰⁶

The nature and structure of the church, or ecclesiology, is a framework for its form and function. In a post-Christendom context, our existing ecclesiology is a contributing factor to our decline and a lack of effective discipleship models in a post-Christendom reality. The internal, hierarchical, and professionalized clergy systems formed in Christendom were created for a world that no longer exists, one where the church was at the center of society. A return to a missional ecclesiology is necessary to recapture the apostolic, missional, incarnational, contextual, and formational identity that birthed the church. FX create a vehicle doing an old thing a new way, which is a means to reengage the outward facing, sent, priesthood of all believers, catalyzing effective discipleship.

God is a sending God and sends the church into the world to go and make disciples. Our inward and academic focus on what it means to be disciples and make disciples forfeits the commission that God has invited us to be a participant in. FX reorient the focus and reframe what it means to be a disciple with incarnational witness and practice. The FX movement invites the priesthood of all believers to recognize and utilize their unique gifts in building Christian community with people who will never likely walk into our existing churches. These new Christian communities form in the everyday places and spaces, networks, and neighborhoods, where lives are lived. By nature, they are missional, incarnational, formational, ecclesial, and contextual, breaking

³⁰⁶ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

down the institutional norms and “one size fits all” approaches our existing churches assume.

We cannot continue to expect people to come to us. However wonderful our worship, preaching, and programs may be, the church is no longer the center of society. As the priesthood is deployed to form FX, discipleship is activated in an entirely new way. Disciples are given permission and empowered to use their gifts. As a result, ideas and experiences of what it means to be a disciple are stretched and strengthened, while disciples encounter new people with a new awareness of the great commission and their part in it outside the walls of the existing church. Additionally, as these disciples are gathered with the existing church, they bring new understanding and awareness to the body. While getting people back to the existing church is never the goal, this too sometimes happens. Here new believers are introduced to the body, and the church continues to adapt and mature while multiplication of disciples continues.

Our Christendom mindset is pervasive and persistent. A missional ecclesiology reorients our focus and reminds us of the “why” for the Great Commission. FX is an instrument through which to return to this missional ecclesiology and orientation, catalyzing effective discipleship and reversing the inward, hierarchical, and professionalized structure indicative of Christendom.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Bees, Pollination, and the Ecology of the Church

The mainline church has been in decline for decades.³⁰⁷ While there are multiple factors at play in the decline, continuing to operate as if Christianity is the religion of the empire or in a Christendom mode, along with approaching discipleship primarily as an academic exercise with an inward focus are especially problematic. How can the church embrace and embody new ways of practicing an ancient faith in their disciple making that translates to multiplication and a reversal of the decline? How might integrating the practices and postures that cultivate a seedbed for FX move the church toward a more diverse and therefore resilient ecosystem for effective and catalytic discipleship?

In this chapter I am employing a knowledge transfer from one field to another through a focus on bees and the variety of impacts that pollinating bees have on our ecosystem. This will serve as a model and potential metaphor for the ecology of the church. Bees are the primary pollinators, and their work dramatically impacts our ecosystem and the ability to produce and multiply fruit, flowers, and seeds needed for

³⁰⁷ “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, June 9, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

35% of the human diet.³⁰⁸ Similarly, the body of Christ, sent to the world, has the potential for impact both deep and wide.

In the beginning God created. The fingerprints of God are all over creation, and our ecological systems contain a blueprint for the body of Christ. As humanity has been sent to go forth and multiply, and to go, make disciples, it is said that bees are sent to go forth and pollinate. Though our world changes, these commissions are unchanging.

The field of “ecology itself has evolved considerably since its birth, building bridges to mathematics, to the physical sciences and engineering, to molecular biology, and, increasingly, to the social sciences.”³⁰⁹ In addition, “ecology, the unifying science in integrating knowledge of life on our planet, has become the essential science in learning how to preserve it.”³¹⁰ There are implication for the future of the church. The church, the body of Christ, though whole is made up of many parts, meant to work together.

Likewise,

“ecology views biological systems as whole, not as independent parts, while seeking to elucidate how these wholes emerge from and affect the parts. Increasingly, this holistic perspective, rechristened as the theory of complex adaptive systems, has informed understanding and improved management of economic and financial systems, social systems, complex materials, and even physiology and medicine—but essentially this means little more than taking an ecological approach to such systems, investigating the interplay among processes at diverse scales and the interaction between systems and their environments.”³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Stephen Buchmann and John S. Ascher, “The Plight of Pollinating Bees,” *Bee World* 86, no. 3 (2005): 71-74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0005772x.2005.11417316>, 71-74.

³⁰⁹ Simon A. Levin and Stephen R. Carpenter, *The Princeton Guide to Ecology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), vii.

³¹⁰ Levin and Carpenter, *The Princeton Guide to Ecology*, vii.

³¹¹ Levin and Carpenter, *The Princeton Guide to Ecology*, vii.

Rather than segments or parts, “ecologists tend to organize their thinking across scales, from cells to organisms, from organisms to populations, from populations to communities, ecosystems, landscapes, and the biosphere.”³¹²

The field of ecology and specifically pollinating bees and their part in our ecosystem speak loudly to the church, its function, its decline, and the potential for a sustainable future. How a hive functions, its impact, the part disruption plays, and its work for sustainability and longevity are helpful illustrations for what the integration of FX in existing churches brings about. This integration, with a more outward facing approach, positively impacts the ecosystem of the existing church, as well as that of the wider world with the potential for reversing decline. “Mainline Christianity has been in numeric decline for the last half century, and within the last decade, American Christianity as a whole, including evangelical Christianity and Catholicism, has been in decline.”³¹³ In 2016 the UMC had 6,951,278 members. That number has declined dramatically from 10,789,624 members in 1969.³¹⁴

The pollination of bees has an incredibly significant impact on human economies.³¹⁵ Because their decline has led to a “pollination crisis” of sorts, it has sparked a new interest in their management and conservation.³¹⁶ Likewise, our attractional, Christendom models of church have led to a discipleship crisis. Interestingly,

³¹² Levin and Carpenter, *The Princeton Guide to Ecology*, vii.

³¹³ David Scott, “United Methodist Insight,” United Methodist Insight (blog), May 26, 2016, <https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-global-nature/coming-to-terms-with-numerical-decline/>.

³¹⁴ William H. Willimon and Robert Leroy Wilson, *Rekindling the Flame: Strategies for a Vital United Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987).

³¹⁵ Keith S. Delaplane and Daniel F. Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees* (Wallingford, CT: CABI Publishing, 2005), xiii.

³¹⁶ Delaplane and Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees*, xiii.

authors Buchmann and Ascher address the significant impacts and implications for a decline in pollinating bees to the global ecosystem in *The Plight of Pollinating Bees*, emphasizing that bees are the world's most dominant pollinators integral to the flowering/fruitlet process, resulting in vegetables and fruits containing seeds, responsible for nearly 35% of the human diet. To some degree, one might be led to draw correlations to the diminishing emphasis and prioritization of the apostolic and evangelistic gifts that have been domesticated out of the ecosystem of the church, therefore creating an unsustainable ecosystem. These gifts, when elevated, are disruptive to the status quo.

Pollination, and the part bees play in it, is significant to our understanding of discipleship processes that are effective and catalytic, impacting both the existing church and the wider world. To better understand the implications it's helpful to understand how pollination occurs.

“Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the male parts (anthers) of a flower to the female part (stigma) of the same or a different flower. If the pollen is compatible fertilization of the ovule and the seed formation can occur. More seeds develop when large numbers of pollen grains are transferred. Seed, in turn, stimulate surrounding ovary tissue to develop, so that, for example, an apple with many seeds will be larger than one with fewer seeds. In this way, good pollination improves both fruit yield and size.”³¹⁷

Bees play a key role in this process. Likewise, as disciples are deployed to start FX moving outside the walls of the church, they embody the mission and have catalytic implications.

FX recapture and embody a way of being that is an ecclesiology formed by mission described in the theological foundations chapter. They are a vehicle for pollinating the gospel in the world while moving the church toward Christian innovation.

³¹⁷ Delaplane and Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees*, 8.

For the sake of this argument, continuing to do what we have always done is ineffective. Alternatively, doing what we have done in new ways promises different results.

“Trying to solve the problem of decline with the same thinking that created it” is an exercise in futility.³¹⁸ Director of Re-missioning for FXNA Dr. Michael Beck poses the question, “How can suffocating institutions find a breath of fresh air that may let them live again? Fresh Expressions is one way that Jesus is breathing afresh on the church.”³¹⁹ As the world is impacted by the gospel message, so too is the church in their sending.

A blended ecology begins to form when FX are integrated into our existing forms of church.

“Fresh Expressions of church in symbiotic relationship with inherited forms of church, in such a way that the combining of these modes over time blend to create a nascent form. Early in the Fresh Expressions US movement, we began to use the language of ‘blended ecology,’ which speaks more potently to the new prevalent family forms, creative process, current cultural realities, and the ancient agrarian language of Jesus’ teaching.”³²⁰

The relationship that develops between and amid these forms adapts and creates a new ecosystem. “The blended ecology is about releasing the priesthood of all believers within existing churches to plant new ecclesial communities.”³²¹ These communities formed, with those that are not yet a part of any church, bring about change within the existing church and community outside as a sort of cross-pollination.

³¹⁸ Michael Adam Beck, *Deep and Wild: Re-Missioning Your Church from the Outside In* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2020), 9.

³¹⁹ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 152.

³²⁰ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 15.

³²¹ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 18.

In his book, *The Honeybee Democracy*, the author describes the unique gifts of each member of the hive and their significance to its proper functioning.³²² Parallels can be drawn to the body of Christ, its many parts, and gifts, and the necessity of each part functioning properly. The body of Christ is not meant to be hierarchical or led by a professional as was addressed in the theological foundations chapter. This points to the need for a return to a missional ecclesiology that recognizes and values the priesthood of all believers. Integral to our maturity as followers of Jesus and the body of Christ, the church, is the recognition and the exercise of the gifts God has given together, as Paul shares in Ephesians 4. Ideally, the whole body will utilize their gifts together for the furthering of one singular purpose, God's mission, rather than many individual purposes.

Working together for a shared purpose may be aspirational for the church. "We now know that the amazing feat of democratic decision making performed by the scout bees offers us deep lessons about how a group of individuals with common interests can structure their group so that it functions as an effective decision-making body."³²³ Bees make decisions by identifying a diverse set of options, freely sharing the information about the options, and aggregating the information to choose the best option.³²⁴ The work of the scout bees is done on their own and not under the guidance of a leader. Though the queen is often seen as a leader, likened to the pastoral role, this is incorrect. The queen is a queen, one amongst the hive. She has a role, as do each of the others. This eliminates one of the greatest challenges in a dominant leadership model advocating for a particular

³²² Thomas D. Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³²³ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 233.

³²⁴ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 234.

outcome without considering other perspectives and possibilities. Scout bees work together well, because they share a common incentive, survival of the hive, which is dependent upon their habitat.³²⁵

Scout bees are always looking for good sources of nectar and pollen and optimal locations to relocate in the event of swarming. In both cases this information is shared freely with the entire colony through a waggle dance. The participants in the project likened this to testimony and storytelling. The scouts go out to investigate further based on the dances shared. No decisions are made quickly or by one member of the group, but rather over time as waggle dance stories are shared as a group.

While the church shares a common mission in theory, our practice speaks otherwise. Our existing ecclesiology elevates the role of the pastor while essentially diminishing the gifts of each of the parts working together as a whole. As a result, most of our churches have a mission force among folk in the pews, who do not grasp the significance of their gifts or their part in the mission. Often decisions and directions are made by a few leaders rather than the whole body, which likely have helpful stories, gifts, and perspectives to share. However, a greater attentiveness to thinking holistically about the mission and leadership are necessary. “Stable, relationally skilled leadership is necessary for FX-C. George Lings argues that he knows of no mature fresh expression or emerging church that does not have its own full-time leader.”³²⁶

³²⁵ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 234.

³²⁶ Sara B. Savage and Eolene M. Boyd-MacMillan, *The Human Face of the Church: A Social Psychology and Pastoral Theology Resource for Pioneer and Traditional Ministry* / Sara Savage and Eolene Boyd-Macmillan (London, UK: Canterbury Press, 2008), 109.

In contrast, bees are hardwired to understand that their role is part of the process and not the product. The success of course is dependent on agreeing on their problems and their process.³²⁷ Their examples have much to teach us. “Besides doing a good job of uncovering options, the members of a decision-making group must also do a good job of sharing the news of their finds. If an individual doesn’t make the news of her discovery public, but instead keeps it private, this information will go unused, and this can lead to an inferior decision by the group.”³²⁸ All views are welcomed and respected.

“Some have said that honeybees are messengers sent by the gods to show us how we ought to live: in sweetness and in beauty and in peacefulness.”³²⁹ Honeybees are prized pollinators and hard-working insects. They “perform on our behalf a critical agricultural mission: go forth and pollinate.”³³⁰ The author reiterates that “inside each teeming beehive is an exemplar of a community whose members succeed in working together to achieve shared goals.”³³¹ This is an illustration of the body of Christ. “These six-legged beauties have something to teach us about building smoothly functioning groups, especially ones capable of exploiting fully the power of democratic decision making.”³³² This is the priesthood of all believers.

Though not hierarchical, “What is true is that a colony’s queen lies at the heart of the whole operation, for a honeybee colony is an immense family consisting of the

³²⁷ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 234.

³²⁸ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 235.

³²⁹ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 236.

³³⁰ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 3.

³³¹ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 3.

³³² Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 3.

mother queen and thousands of progeny.”³³³ Similarly, in our post-Christendom reality, we see a church that prizes networks rather than a traditional hierarchy in how it functions.³³⁴ To be clear, leaders are needed, however for emerging generations “their view is that the primary role for leadership is to help people create ‘space’ for encountering God.”³³⁵

While there is not a hierarchy, leadership is needed, just as Christ is head of the church. There is a mutuality and a deference to the other as all work together for the benefit of the whole. This is both significant to the hive and to the body of Christ. In the summer months, the queen daily and monotonously lays 1500 or so eggs needed to maintain the hive’s workforce, oblivious to the colonies changing needs to which the workers are constantly adapting.³³⁶ She does her work for the thriving of the colony and the colony theirs. “Bees in a hive, much like cells in a body, work together without an overseer to create a functional unit; whose abilities far transcend those of its constituents.”³³⁷ The sum is greater than its parts and all of the roles in the hive and the church are necessary to its thriving.

The ability of bees to impact an existing ecosystem with a variety of pollens from all the places and spaces that are pollinated along the way in this process speaks loudly to the FX movement. FX afford a sort of pollination and cross-pollination as the gathered disciples are sent into the world to impact the ecosystem while bringing the pollen of

³³³ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 5.

³³⁴ Savage and Boyd-MacMillan, *The Human Face of the Church*, 109.

³³⁵ Savage and Boyd-MacMillan, *The Human Face of the Church*, 109.

³³⁶ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 5.

³³⁷ Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 6.

their experience in making disciples in a less than homogenous environment, the outer world, back to the colony. In turn, this process constantly introduces newness and presses the hive to adapt, innovate, and iterate. Similarly, the Beguines organized the shared life of their missional communities within the cities they inhabited rather than being insulated or separate from the world in nunneries or monasteries, cloistered from the world outside and internally focused. Their ability to “cross-pollinate” from their shared life and practice of their faith to the wider community had an impact not only on them but on the wider secular community as they worked to support themselves and one another in secular jobs, theological academia, and the church.

Anne Huntsinger is the owner/operator of Wren Farms in Grayson, Georgia. In addition to cows and other wildlife, she keeps bees. In an interview with her, she reiterated the importance of bees to our ecosystem and food chain. She is a lover of the land and plants intentionally to provide a habitat that is healthy and diverse for bees with clover, radish, winter peas, and fescue. “Heathy hives,” says Anne, “are ones that are heavy, have a lot of activity, and are full of bees.”³³⁸ I was especially fascinated by her description of the role of the drone, whose only purpose was to eat and reproduce. Drones die in the mating process. The workers, however, are highly adaptive. They do all of the chores inside the hive at an early age and then move outside becoming the collectors of pollen and nectar dependent upon what is needed.”³³⁹

Anne shared how her primary role in keeping the hive healthy was keeping water out and providing mite treatments (a major threat to any hive). The bees did their part to

³³⁸ Anne Huntsinger, Honeybee Habitat. Personal Interview, November, 2021.

³³⁹ Anne Huntsinger, Honeybee Habitat. Personal Interview, November, 2021.

keep the environment favorable from “bearding” to cool off the hive to huddling and buzzing to provide warmth in the hive. It is amazing what they are able to accomplish together. Food, she shared, is their major motivator. While all bees have a part to play, she reiterated that the queen is one of many parts, yet necessary for laying fertilized eggs that will grow to be the worker bees. Any other eggs that are laid and unfertilized by other female bees become drones.³⁴⁰

“A honeybee colony is a social entity exhibiting a high degree of division of labor.”³⁴¹ As the environment changes, the colony adapts. “Any change in the colony condition is sensed by the hive bees, which pass this information to the foragers. The latter immediately respond to the changed condition in the colony and adjust their foraging behavior.”³⁴² In contrast, the existing church seems to become more rigid and less adaptable as the world around it changes. “Changes in the internal environment of the honeybee colony influence its foraging response.”³⁴³ The sustainable quality of these changes varies.

Researchers asked, “Do the short-term responses sustain for an unlimited period or do they wear off after some time?”³⁴⁴ Answering these questions was the aim of Sihag and Kaur’s study. Insight into these revelations has proven helpful in devising the

³⁴⁰ Anne Huntsinger, Honeybee Habitat. Personal Interview, November, 2021.

³⁴¹ Charles D. Michener, *The Social Behavior of The Bees: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

³⁴² Ram Chandler Sihag and Gurminder Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” *Journal of Ecology and The Natural Environment* 10, no. 6 (August 2018): 109, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5897/JENE2017.0679>, 109.

³⁴³ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 109.

³⁴⁴ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 109.

strategies for the management and use of the honeybee colonies for honey production and pollination to crops.”³⁴⁵ Similarly, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances provides insight to the dilemma the church faces and the potential that FX make possible.

Researchers experimented to measure long and short-term responses to changes in internal parameters. Essentially when the numbers of the most vulnerable were increased, there was a marked increase in the number of pollen foragers (immediate food source for the bees). This is needed to feed the developing larvae.³⁴⁶ Interestingly, the bees demonstrate an adaptability and shift to pollen foraging, impacting a decrease in nectar foraging. A more developed, mature brood introduced to the hive did not influence foragers either way. One might liken this to the large numbers of already Christians that seem to play musical chairs with church membership. Increases in pollen stores over time, however, resulted in pollen foragers decreasing and nectar foragers increasing slightly.³⁴⁷

Long-term there were only two responses that were sustainable. An increase in the unsealed (immature) brood brought about an increase in the number of pollen foragers significantly. With the increase of the strength of the colony, nectar foragers increased. No other responses were sustainable over the long-term.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 109.

³⁴⁶ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 116.

³⁴⁷ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 117.

³⁴⁸ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 119-120.

The adaptive capacity of the colony is noteworthy. “The needs of the colony generate the foraging stimulus and the colony witnesses the resultant foraging response.”³⁴⁹ Said simply, a disruptive event brought about increases that both expanded and strengthened the hive. “If the internal parameters of the honeybee colony are altered, the colony immediately changes its foraging activity according to its emergent need, and a negative or positive feedback mechanism works to regulate the needed parameter.”³⁵⁰ Hives adapt appropriately to the changing environment both inside and outside of the hive. Because of the constant activity to and from the hive, there is a greater consistency in the need to adapt, as new pollens are introduced along with new bees.

Unfortunately, for the most part, the internal focus of the institutional church prevents this consistent exchange and is resistant and closed off to outside influence or disruptive forces, prizing instead the predictability of the status quo. This therefore creates a false ecosystem that fails to result in adaptive capacity, resilience, and the fruit of effective discipleship. This was emphasized in my argument for an embrace of a missional ecclesiology. Alternatively, “a Fresh Expression forces a congregation to look outside itself,” therefore creating a more sustainable future.³⁵¹

In an article published by *Bee World*, the authors speak to the future oriented nature of pollination by bees. Bees are the only pollinators that do not pollinate for

³⁴⁹ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 125.

³⁵⁰ Sihag and Kaur, “Patterns of Short- Long-Term Responses of Honey Bees (*Apis Mellifera* L.) Colony in Its Internal Environment,” 126-127.

³⁵¹ Michael Adam Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches: Revitalizing the Church in the Blended Ecology* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2019), 94.

themselves alone but for the generations that follow them.³⁵² Rather than their own preservation alone, these pollinators have their eye on the future generations and adjust accordingly. This draws connections to the outward and communal focus, as well as to the longevity in the life cycle of a both/and, blended ecology church that integrates FX into its existing model.

In another article, the same authors focus on the changes in habitats and land use and their impacts on pollinating bees. Again, this poses a sharp contrast to the internally focused self-preservation mode and habitat of the institutional church and its inability to produce the fruit of discipleship in the changing climate of our post-Christendom reality.

The growing focus in the climate of decline is “how do we get more people in the building” rather than “how do we share Jesus with more people.” Subsequently, the church has stalled in its mission and has failed to make disciples who make disciples. Conversely, bees are always looking for the best environment for both survival and multiplication. For that reason, bees swarm when they get crowded rather than getting comfortable. The result is multiplication through division. “A crowded colony rears several daughter queens, then the mother queen flies away from the colony with up to 60% of the workers. The swarm then occupies a new nest site.”³⁵³ It is fascinating to consider the implications for the church, as the hive sends the older queen to begin again with part of the hive, while the new, younger queen stays with the existing hive, so that both might multiply in both places. “Because of this perennial lifecycle a honeybee

³⁵² Sarah A Corbet, Ingrid H Williams, and Juliet L Osborne, “Bees and the Pollination of Crops and Wild Flowers in the European Community,” *Bee World* 72, no. 2 (1991): pp. 47-59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0005772x.1991.11099079>.

³⁵³ Keith S. Delaplane and Daniel F. Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees*, 38.

colony is potentially immortal, and nest sites tend to be occupied year after year.”³⁵⁴

Again, the adaptive capacity of the colony is incredibly poignant in the sense that both those that remain and those that swarm have to begin again in one sense or another.

The new ecosystem of the church, created through FX of church tethered to our existing models, are representative of the exchange of pollen, the impact on the existing hive, and the wider ecosystem, as “new generations” emerge, and fruit is multiplied. The fingerprints of God and God’s design for creation are evident. “The resurrection ecosystem is one in which the Spirit’s power to disrupt the cycles of sin and death has become fully realized. It is a place in the sense of real time and space.”³⁵⁵

In many ways, we make being the church complicated, and yet “while the church is a significantly complex living organism, we should not need an advanced degree to understand and talk about her.”³⁵⁶ The authors of *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* address the challenges of the unknown uncovered in their own beekeeping adventure. From cultivating an atmosphere for the “natural” (bees) in an urban landscape to the fear of an increase of stings on the campus where they began to keep the bees, the metaphors and connections to the integration of FX in existing models of church that lead to effective discipleship are endless.³⁵⁷

Often FX are perceived as competition for the existing church rather than an additional expression for people who will likely never walk in our doors. Likewise,

³⁵⁴ Delaplane and Mayer, *Crop Pollination by Bees*, 38.

³⁵⁵ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 165.

³⁵⁶ Beck, *Deep and Wild*, 165.

³⁵⁷ Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut, *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

Delaplane and Mayer speak to the benefits of crop pollination by bees and describe them as endless. Good pollination translates to higher quality and yield, larger fruit, and faster ripening. These factors highlight how FX, as they are introduced to the ecosystem of the current models of church, create a blended and therefore more diverse and resilient ecology that produces fruit and multiplies disciples.

Pollinating bees are an integral part of our ecosystem. Likewise, effective discipleship processes are an integral part of the ecosystem of the church and its long-term sustainability in God's mission. How bees organize themselves, understanding their roles, and working together for the good of the whole, speaks directly to our understanding, or lack thereof, of the individual parts in the body of Christ working together as a whole to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission. Additionally, the impact that pollinating bees have on their own environment as they carry pollen and nectar back and forth speaks to the positive impact on outward facing discipleship that is afforded by FX on both the existing church and the wider community. In both cases, there is an exchange, resulting in a greater yield of fruit.

The practice of consistent work that is oriented to the sustaining of the next generation is eye opening to our current disciple making methods that are all too often academic, internal, individualistic, and anemic. Finally, disruption to the existing hives ultimately strengthened them as a whole, creating greater resilience, while simultaneously expanding the next generation. The disruptive and innovative nature of a FX within an existing church has the potential to do the same. There is a mutuality to the benefits. Disciples that grow to understand their unique gifts and the importance of using them together to build up the body have the potential to mature individually while playing a

part in the maturity of the body. They are simultaneously being deployed to make more disciples who make more disciples as they are being matured as disciples. As a result they continue to develop a greater resilience, adaptive postures, and connection to the wider world to which we have been sent.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

In previous chapters, a biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundation has been laid to support this project that is directed at catalyzing effective discipleship through fresh expressions of church. The foundational chapters provide the framework and the basis for its implementation. The problem continues to emerge as we witness the growing decline in our inherited, mostly attractional, forms of church. The existing church continues to rely mainly on Sunday morning worship attendance as its primary means to engage new people and invite them into discipleship. The hypothesis is that by starting new forms of church or FX-C, we engage not only new people that will never walk into the doors of our existing churches but also catalyze effective discipleship within the existing church.

The project was carried out over six weeks and was implemented as a series of workshops. The workshops were not the catalyst for change themselves, but rather spotlighted the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary research that is foundational to the why and how of the FX movement and its impact on our understanding and practice of effective discipleship. Laity from a church that started a FX-C that is now five years old participated in the workshops. Most participants have been actively involved in the FX, while a few have not. The influence of FX and the

workshops were measured by pre and post-workshop questionnaires, a pre-survey, group discussions, practice debriefs, and post-workshop interviews. A primary tool for measuring effective discipleship in those participating FX-C is a tool used by the Church of England to measure fruitfulness. Appendix A contains an executive summary of the results of the UK study. Highlights of the same study, surveying a focus group from the inherited church in the US, are contained within this chapter affording a comparative analysis. The entirety of the US focus group results can be found in appendix B

Many of the threads of my life came together along with the experiences of my ministry contexts in designing this project. In instances both personal and ministry related I feel as if I am an outsider. The FX movement has given me new language and shifted paradigms in my understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, and the Church's future.

The growing decline of our Sunday morning worship experiences has translated to diminishing returns regarding making disciples that make disciples when we rely primarily on worship gatherings to engage potential seekers or new believers. Redefining our understanding of effective discipleship is necessary if we are to make disciples that make disciples amid a rapidly changing church and world. Further, we often equate faith-based classes, curriculum, and knowledge with discipleship. Doing so neglects practical, incarnational, and embodied faith that rearranges models. This moves us to rely on God, into deeper prayer, greater humility, and an embrace of community and accountability, as we seek to follow Jesus.

The epilogue to John's gospel, John 21:1-14 illustrates what effective discipleship looks like and is the biblical foundation of this project. The disciples are reminded that

Jesus called them to do an old thing, fishing, in a new way, fishing for people. Learning to do this required going outside of what they knew and outside of their own ability and moved them toward following God's leading and instructions into the future. This pericope illustrates how humility, obedience, reliance on God, and a willingness to do an old thing a new way bears great fruit for God's kingdom. Similarly, the willingness to create new forms of church, new ways of doing an old thing, requires humility as comfortable and predictable approaches are left behind. Likewise, a greater reliance on God and a robust prayer life emerge as we respond in obedience to the Spirit's leading and Jesus's commissioning that takes us outside of predictable norms to 'cast the net on the other side.'

The medieval movement of laywomen, or the Beguines, demonstrate a willingness to cross boundaries and break through glass ceilings. They embody how the life of a disciple can integrate a deeply rooted life of faith in the everyday spaces of the world. The Beguines personify the contextual, missional, incarnational, ecclesial, and formational characteristics of the FX journey. The Beguines supported themselves and one another financially by working in the marketplace, providing accountability, practicing their faith together in community and in the marketplace, and creating their own rule of life based on their context not an order. The Beguines wrote and preached in the local vernacular making faith and scripture more accessible to everyday people from all segments of society. They worked in trades and helping vocations, and by nature of how they lived and practiced their faith, had the ability to operate in the church, academia, and the marketplace.

Those who start FX are often empowered lay people. This broadens the mission field and removes the perceived barrier of professional clergy and church buildings. This connection with the world outside the church walls provides a benefit to gathering and forming relationships with people that will never walk into a church building, people already encountered in daily life. Therefore, this accessibility expands the mission force of the church, embracing discipleship in every area of a person's life, not just what happens in a class or in the church building.

Reordering the church around a missional ecclesiology provides a theological foundation for understanding the FX movement, expands the mission force of the church, and is the basis for the workshop that addresses our understanding of who makes disciples. Missional ecclesiology furthers the movement in which the church was birthed, the mission of God. Rather than relying on professional clergy to do the work of the church, the gifts of the body are recognized, celebrated, and deployed for God's mission together. The priesthood of believers is equipped and empowered to be the church in the world rather than a building. All are given gifts for the work of the church (Eph 4:11-14) that can only grow into maturity together.

Finally, the church is not an organization, but an organism, Christ's body. While the church needs structure and a framework that frame has overwhelmed its function and led to rigidity and institutionalism. What is needed is an understanding of the changing world outside the church. And with this understanding an appreciation for, rather than a fear or avoidance of, the world God so loved and an urgency to share the gospel message. This is not only for the good of the world but for our own good, created in the image of the sending God who sent the Son and the Spirit.

The body of Christ has been given many gifts and instructed throughout Paul's letters that it is only in using them together for the sake of the world that we can grow to maturity. The field of ecology and the impact of pollinating honeybees on their environment and the environment on honeybees further illustrates the significance of disciples sent to the world, their impact on the world outside the church and on the existing church as they reengage those inside.

Pollinating honeybees are responsible for 35% of the human diet and have a major impact on our environment. Their focus on the good of the whole, or democracy of the honeybee as one writer noted, and the thriving of the hive means working together and playing their part. Though there is a queen, she is one among the hive. There is a lack of hierarchy and an interdependence which points to what is problematic in an institutional system of pastoral leadership that creates an atmosphere of learned helplessness. Rather, like a hive, the body of Christ is intended to be an organism all functioning together for the mission of God. This interdisciplinary field exhibits a beautiful example for churches to consider as they design discipleship pathways and invite believers into a discipleship journey. Churches can assist individuals in discovering their unique and God given gifts, facilitate finding community and team building, and provide and support experiential learning, practice, and experimentation outside the hive for its flourishing.

Any church considering FX should be encouraged that FX increase discipleship engagement and deepen relationships with God and others. What follows is an in-depth analysis of data, methodology, implementation of the project, and a summary of learning. Included are observations about its effectiveness and possible future adaptation for use in

churches seeking to create or adapt existing discipleship pathways that are more holistic in nature.

Methodology

The project data was collected employing primarily a qualitative approach due to time constraints and size of focus group to measure cognitive change through the six workshops. Some conative change was measured through use of the Fruitfulness Framework survey employed by the Church of England and adapted for the US focus group. Five methods were utilized to collect data: pre and post-workshop questionnaires, group discussions/practice debriefs, post-workshop interviews, and the Fruitfulness Framework Survey. The questionnaires and survey accommodated a large set of questions providing insight into changes in thinking before and after the workshops and changes in practice before participating in a fresh expression and since. Group discussions and practice debriefs afforded greater interaction around the foundational components and their practical implications, and post-workshop interviews allowed for more in-depth conversation around the participant's response to and experience of the workshops.

The pre and post-workshop questionnaires were identical before and after the workshops. These questions can be found in appendix C. The questions were asked to determine the participant's understanding of core concepts of discipleship, mission, practice, and their biblical, historical, and theological foundations. The Fruitfulness Framework survey was given only to those who were actively participating in a FX. Other participants in the workshop did not take this survey. Group discussions at the beginning of workshops 2-6 provided space to debrief the prior week's practice activity.

Additionally, group discussions followed each of the teaching presentations to engage the topic and gauge understanding. Post-workshop interviews were conducted via Zoom in the three weeks after concluding the workshops and allowed for in-depth conversation to better understand the participant's experience and the implications for designing more robust discipleship pathways, unbiased by other participants' viewpoints.

Professional associates provided guidance in the questions asked and the tools employed in designing the project as well as insight into how best to engage and report the data collected. Context associates assisted with engagement in the Fruitfulness Framework survey across the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. This survey, employed by the UK and adapted for the US focus group afforded the possibility of a comparative analysis. Context associates, other FX movement leaders in North Georgia, reviewed the data collected and provided feedback to identify future use of some of the tools.

I believe that the tools were successful, collecting the data from the workshops was smooth, however engagement in the Fruitfulness Framework was not as wide as anticipated. I do believe however that the impact of the workshops was positive and supportive of the hypothesis and points to future use.

Participants were recruited through a church-wide invitation in a previous ministry context that had engaged with forming FX-C. Nine individuals participated in the workshops, six of which are actively participating in a FX and three whom were members of the inherited church that started the FX, that have not actively participated in it. Thirteen individuals engaged the Fruitfulness Framework survey from across the North Georgia Conference. All participants come from or have experience within the inherited

church. The survey sought to measure the impact of engaging in FX on the life of the disciple. A missed opportunity may have been to have the three church members that had not participated in the FX take the survey in regard to their own discipleship within the existing church in more general terms to highlight the differences between those engaged in FX.

Implementation

The anchor for the project was a six-week workshop. Once recruited, participants were provided the schedule, consent form, and expectations via email communication. All participants were made aware that the workshops were a part of my doctoral research.

All sessions were held on Wednesday evenings at the host church, Douglasville First United Methodist Church, in their library, a large comfortable space where we could spread out and move around. A light supper was provided for the participants at no cost to them as an act of appreciation and hospitality and demonstration of my firm belief that people connect in unique ways when they share a meal.

The workshops were taught through presentations that included PowerPoint, videos, group discussions, and practice debriefs. The six modules that made up the workshop were:

1. Overview of Fresh Expressions
2. Biblical Foundations-Doing an Old Thing a New Way; John 21:1-14
3. Historical Foundations-A Pioneering Movement of Laywomen; The Beguines
4. Theological Foundations-Missional Ecclesiology; The Priesthood of All Believers

5. Interdisciplinary Foundations-Pollinating Honeybees; the Ecology of the Church in the World

6. Toward Catalytic Discipleship-A Rule of Life for Post-Christendom

Designing the modules accordingly afforded an opportunity to share the fruit of my research and its implications while engaging additional believers in these concepts and gaining their feedback.

The first module began with getting reacquainted as this was a prior ministry context. Participants were then asked to sign consent forms and complete the pre workshop questionnaire that was at the beginning of their participant notebook (appendix C). Following this, an introduction highlighting content from the contextual analysis and the problem/solution addressed by the project was shared before turning to the first presentation, “Overview of Fresh Expressions” as a frame for the coming weeks. This presentation spotlighted the why, what, how and who of fresh expressions along with a brief history pointing to the precipitating decline in the church in the UK. In addition, the definitions of inherited, traditional, and institutional church were unpacked. Before closing our time together participants were given an info graphic card with a weekly practice for each week of the workshops. The first week’s practice was a prayer walk in their neighborhood or in an area they frequented. Instructions were provided and most were familiar with the practice as this was something that began as a regular rhythm of the church prior to starting the first fresh expression.

The second module, “Biblical Foundations,” supported the view that fresh expressions catalyze discipleship using an illustration from scripture. Before beginning we discussed the practice of prayer walking from the previous week. The text from John

21:1-14 was read aloud, and participants shared what stuck out to them. The agreement amongst theologians and scholars that John 21 is a sort of epilogue was shared and the question posed as to why an epilogue was necessary. A recording of a sermon I preached on this text was shown. There was discussion around why the disciples, and us, need to be reminded that Jesus called those who followed him to do an old thing a new way? Some of our defaults to comfort, a sense of inadequacy, doing things in our own ability, and disobedience were highlighted.

Module three, “Historical Foundations,” highlighted the lives of the Beguines, a missional movement of laywomen from the medieval era. We began by debriefing the previous week’s practice of sharing John 21:1-14 in their own words with someone. The shape of the Beguines lives and how they embodied the contextual, ecclesial, formational, and missional framework of fresh expressions was emphasized in the presentation. The willingness of the Beguines to go outside of societal norms to practice their faith in community in a new way was also highlighted. A video was shared about the history of the Beguines to supplement the presentation.

The fourth module, “Theological Foundations,” drove home the implications of organizing the church around a missional ecclesiology. Before the presentation we debriefed the previous week’s practice of drawing a prayer map and praying through it daily while listening for invitations from God. Missional and ecclesiology were defined and their implications for the organization of the church as we know it highlighted. The missional movement, Vatican II, and the apostle Peter’s priesthood of all believers were emphasized. A video was shared about missional ecclesiology from Forge America to supplement the presentation.

In the fifth week of workshops, pollinating honeybees were featured as a model for moving toward a healthy church ecosystem in “Interdisciplinary Foundations.” The debrief of the prior week’s practice of loving and serving a marginalized person and/or hosting a neighborhood party and inviting neighbors to bring something was discussed before the presentation. Using examples from healthy hives and their habits, the presentation emphasized the impact that pollinating honeybees have on the environment outside the hive and how what the bees encounter in the outside environment impacts the health of the hive. In addition, the democratic nature of how honeybees work together for the health of the hive was taught and connections drawn to how the inherited church organizes itself for mission and discipleship.

Module six, “Toward Catalytic Discipleship,” provided an opportunity to synergize everything that had been unpacked in previous weeks, and to think both creatively and practically about how we design our discipleship pathways to be more holistic and therefore effective and catalytic. This was accomplished through group discussion about the challenges present in our current discipleship processes, some possible changes to make, and the part fresh expressions might have to play in this effort. Using Edward Debono’s Six Thinking Hats tool, we categorized what had been covered in the weeks prior and talked through the process of thinking using the Blue Hat. For the White Hat we talked about the facts observed in our current discipleship processes. For the Yellow Hat participants were invited to name positives about our current processes. For the Black Hat we discussed the difficulties and challenges of our current processes. We discussed the feeling evoked by the current reality of discipleship processes during our Red Hat portion. Finally, we discussed ideas about how to move toward a new reality

of discipleship with the Green Hat. This brainstorming time employed a tool called the Lotus Blossom. We began with the problem at the center, “What elements are necessary to catalyze effective discipleship?” The group named seven key components (they could not name an eighth) and participants were broken into groups and assigned a component to brainstorm eight ways to make that practical.

Prior to beginning the presentation, we debriefed week five’s practice of having a conversation with someone we encountered regularly about what God was doing in their own life and asking what God was or wasn’t doing in the other person’s life. We closed the workshop with time to complete the post-questionnaire and setting up post-workshop interviews. The final practice exercise given was designing their own fresh expression. Who are the people? Where and when do they gather? What does it look like to love and build community together? What might discipleship look like with this group?

In the interest of undergirding the workshops, providing a place for journal entries and notes, and confidentiality, I designed a workbook that included the problem/solution statement, pre and post questionnaires, group discussion questions, and journal prompts. I handed out and collected these each week to maintain security of the data. Each workbook was given a participant number and participant’s chose their own. In addition, I created an infographic handout that included the practice exercises for each week of the workshops. The infographic can be found in appendix D.

Summary of Learning

The hypothesis for this project was that our existing discipleship processes are anemic of practice, knowledge based, and internally focused. Participation in fresh expressions provides an embodied and externally focused quality to our discipleship

processes and therefore catalyzes effective discipleship. An analysis of the data points illustrates both a cognitive and conative change and the need to adapt our current discipleship models toward more holistic processes. What follows are key takeaways within each of the data points. Further, there are learnings that illuminate potential future use and inform the proposed artifacts of a post-Christendom rule of life and a coaching guide for designing or redesigning discipleship processes to be more holistic in nature.

Fruitfulness Framework Survey

Those surveyed came primarily from the Douglasville First United Methodist focus group and included others from five FX across the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The results of the US survey can be found in their entirety in appendix B. The methodology, demographics, and results are in the executive summary from the UK and are included in appendix A and can also be found at <https://www.eidoresearch.com/fruitfulness-framework>. Some of the highlights are shared here. The respondents were 46.2% female and 53.8% male. All were white and were 25 years old and older. Of the participants, 8.3% had not been a part of a church for two or more years. The following table lists some of the positive changes where participants both agreed and strongly agreed.

Table 1. Percent Change From When Joined FX to Currently

Question	Before FX	Currently	%Change
I want to read the Bible	77	84.6	+7.6
Meet others to intentionally help grow in life/faith	38.5	53.9	+15.4
FX is safe place to ask questions	53.9	100	+46.1
Felt like helping others	30.8	69.2	+38.4
Feelings of love toward others	92.3	100	+7.7
Forgiveness for others	46.2	76.9	+30.7
Give money to my community	69.2	92.3	+23.1
Know what people in larger community hope for/need	53.8	100	+46.2
Felt like I belonged	53.9	92.3	+38.4
Wanted to try new things/take risks	76.9	100	+30.8

Source: US Fruitfulness Framework Survey, Appendix B

Pre and Post-Workshop Questionnaires

The questionnaires helped in revealing the participants understanding and practice of discipleship. Participants were each provided a workbook at the beginning of the workshop. The workbook contained both the pre and post-workshop questionnaire along with the space for them to record their answers. Questions can be found in appendix C. The questionnaire enabled the group to unpack their own understanding of what it means to be a disciple and reflect on what had impacted their understanding and practice as

disciples. The first prompt posed, “In your own words define disciple.” Participants answered similarly with an emphasis on following Jesus and his teachings to become more like him. Some further articulated this by adding that sharing these teachings and ways of being with the world is imperative.

While there was nearly 100% agreement in response to question two, “Do you have to make disciples to be a disciple?” one person disagreed seeming to wrestle with the idea of sowing versus reaping reflecting that some sowed where they may never reap. As a result, one might be led to consider that this participant equated making disciples with a transaction or numeric metric rather than a relational or transformational quality.

Question three invited participants to name specific practices and postures that are important in the life of a disciple. A variety of things were named including prayer, bible study, fellowship/community, listening for the Spirit, humility, service, loving God and loving others.

The fourth questions asked, “What are major roadblocks to effective discipleship?” Some of the lists were longer than others. The following list captures the tone of the responses: fear, rejection, failure, feelings of inadequacy, lack of relationship with nonbelievers, hurt within church, pride, thinking someone else will do it, lack of confidence in sharing own testimony, bad behavior of Christians being judgmental, lack of knowledge, lack of maturity in church, anxiety about not doing things right, not understanding what a disciple is, not prioritizing efforts to become one, not having community which nurtures the process, not feeling worthy or capable, not having spiritual leadership, complacency, selfishness. These responses warrant further investigation and point to many systemic problems in our current methods.

Unlike the previous prompts, the fifth one invited participants to rank in order of importance the following practices in life of disciple; daily prayer, loving and serving marginalized people, faith sharing, generosity, and reading the bible, with “1” being most important. There were not significant differences in the responses between pre and post-questionnaires. There was however a great deal of importance placed on prayer and Bible study in both. Generosity, loving service, and faith sharing ranked third, fourth, and fifth both times to varying degrees.

Question six asked, “What is the greatest challenge to the existing church in forming effective disciples?” Respondents answered with the following: not going beyond the walls of the existing church, not meeting people where they are, leadership, being inwardly focused, being too comfortable being fed themselves and not wanting to reach out to others, and a resistance to serving and participation, or consumeristic mindset. Some commented that daily stuff and the pace of life conflicted with effectiveness. Others stated that having roles and boundaries to do things in certain ways was prohibitive. Finally, some stated that not going deep enough, settling for being cultural Christians and expecting others to come to church building, and a lack of desire was problematic.

To further understand the participants’ starting point and understanding of discipleship they were asked to define the church in their own words in prompt seven. Most participants defined the church as the body of Christ, God’s people, or a body or community of believers who worship God together. Of note, one participant who was not a part of the FX described the church as a place where people meet to learn more about God and fellowship with other believers.

The eighth prompt of the pre/post-workshop questionnaire asked participants to describe a fruitful disciple in their own words. Responses read as follows: One who loves Jesus and others, putting oneself last, sacrificial, influencer of others, good steward of the resources God has provided, loves by word and deed, a lifelong learner, meets people where they are, someone who prioritizes their relationship with Christ, and one who is aware and open to the needs and possibilities that can bring others to the Christian life.

While there were not substantive changes in the post-workshop responses, participants seemed to agree that there are many opportunities to explore in how we make disciples that make disciples. Many articulated a new hunger to draw closer to Jesus, understand their gifts, and take authority and responsibility for their life in Christ. The pre and post-workshop questionnaire provided important data to illustrate the problems in our existing discipleship processes and makes the case for new models and further investigation.

Group Discussions

Group discussions were a significant portion of each of our gatherings both prior to the presentation in debriefing the practice participants had engaged in during the previous week and following the presentation to engage what was presented. These discussions enabled me to address any points that resonated, questions that bubbled up, and identify any potential applications that might be suggested. Additionally, these discussions helped to further identify material for future use in creating a coaching guide for churches designing or redesigning their discipleship processes. Some of the key observations from each of the workshops follow.

Workshop one introduced the project and gave an overview of the FX movement. Discussion questions were focused on the participants' understanding and experience of FX and any obstacles to starting FX that they might foresee or even have experienced. Some commented that they don't know people outside of the church. Others noted that there are lonely people everywhere. There was a lot of conversation about trust and building trust that is essential in faith sharing. One person declared, "Discipleship is not telling people something." FX seemed to build an awareness of possibility(ies) connections/communities a quality that the inherited church did not seem to have, at least one person remarked. Two of the biggest obstacles named were a resistance to change, and a perceived waste of resources because we can't measure, or there are no metrics to quantify what Spirit is doing. Another participant remarked that an obstacle is "Being a prisoner of an environment" adding that this blinds us from seeing a different model of being church.

The second workshop began with a debrief of their practice exercise of a prayer walk of their neighborhood, favorite shopping center, or hangout one or more times during the week. Participants were asked to listen for invitations from God. Many shared how much this raised their awareness and attentiveness to the people and places God had already put in front of them.

After the presentation, the discussion centered on the John 21:1-14 text and the ways it illustrated what discipleship looked like, how it connected with the participants' own experience, or call to discipleship, and conversation about the last time they did something new to follow Jesus. Comments were made about Jesus's expectancy in already cooking the fish and patiently waiting for the disciples. One participant

commented that this was a call to persistence when you are ready to give up but also a willingness to do things a different way. According to the group discipleship looks like obedience, following Jesus' lead, doing what Jesus says to do, jumping out of the boat, changing directions, casting a wide net, not playing it safe, or comfortable, or thinking it is easy. Discipleship, one shared, requires patience before provision. One participant asked quizzically, how they missed 153 fish if they were "right there" in front of them drawing connections to our own blindness of the great harvest in front of us. Another commented that the church keeps throwing to same side and is not looking around. Still others shared that, "We are concentrated on the same people, and "We think we have to go across the globe/sea instead of across the street."

Workshop three began with a debrief of the practice participants were asked to engage in over the course of the week; sharing John 21:1-14 in their own words with someone. Further reflection on the text as they shared with others came to light. One commented that God provides the "catch" and that it is right in front of us.

Group discussion around the presentation on the Beguines elicited responses such as they were fearless, local, motivated, and Jesus-like. The Beguines had great courage in their time. They didn't ask permission. They were not beholden to a hierarchy. This was a community led by the Spirit. Participants were fascinated by the accessibility of scripture in vernacular that the Beguines provided. When asked in what ways they recognized their own practices as they follow Jesus many commented that they were lacking and had a long way to go.

Workshop four began with a debrief of the prior week's practice of drawing a map including all the places they frequent on a daily/weekly/monthly basis and praying

through the map in their daily prayer, listening for God's invitations. Participants shared how much this raised their level of awareness about the mission field in front of them and made them more attentive to the people they encountered.

The discussion centered on how the theology of missional ecclesiology challenged their own experiences of the church and how anchoring our discipleship and formation in mission would change what we currently do. We do-material value. God's immaterial, God's economy doesn't work the ways ours does, our defaults. Cliche prayer. Missions is a budget line item that only involves a few people. One remarked that most of the church is internally focused on paying the bills and getting people *here*. Several shared similar sentiments about how they had been taught that you had to come into church, be saved, and be "discipled" before you go out. One commented and others agreed that "you grow so much more when you serve." Another articulated the internal focus by sharing that a lot of the churches they had been involved with emphasized that being a disciple is about how you stay true, pure, clean—separate, extracting ourselves from the world. They argued against this thinking saying, "Jesus wasn't worried about 2nd hand smoke." One person concluded that, "You don't have to be perfect, you don't have to be "saved" to serve other people." Many agreed that organizing the church around a missional ecclesiology would mean we spent a lot more money and time outwardly than inwardly. One went so far as to say it wouldn't really matter what the building (campus was like). "I'd rather be in a little church where the building is old and kinda not in the greatest shape where they are doing a lot for God than be in a big, beautiful mansion of church that's kinda cold."

The fifth workshop highlighted the interdisciplinary foundation work around pollinating honeybees. The debrief of the practice began the discussion as participants shared if they chose to love and serve a marginalized person or group or hosted a neighborhood party and invited everyone to bring something. Interestingly this proved to be a big ask with few following through or making this a priority. However, most continued to be more attentive to those they were encountering in their daily rhythms, engaging in conversation, and listening.

The group discussion helped to draw connections to the illustration of pollinating honeybees and how we understand discipleship within the church. Comments included that we need to come back and do a better waggle dance, or testimony, and share stories about where God is moving in the world and in our lives. Reflecting further on the waggle dance and communication amongst the hive, one commented that we need to listen to one another better. The group was moved by the democratic decision-making process and attentiveness to the bees' environment and context and the example that could be for the church that operates hierarchically with a few people making all the decisions. Some reflected on the trust amongst hive and how they work together cohesively. All were amazed at the sacrifice and adaptive capacity of the hive in that when the hive swarms 2/3 went out to a new place with the old queen requiring the remaining hive to adapt to a new queen. Participants concluded that if we aren't going out the ecosystem dies and that everyone got to "dance."

Workshop six began with a debrief of the practice participants were invited to engage in over the course of the week. This consisted of having a conversation with someone they encounter regularly on their prayer map about what God has done in their

own life lately and asking the person they encounter to share where they are experiencing or not experiencing God. The comment that struck me most in discussing this practice was from one participant that said they did not even have conversations like this in Sunday school. This researcher believes that God talk is significant to the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit. In the beginning God and humanity walked and talked directly to one another. Prior to the Fall humanity began to talk about God and then after the Fall humanity was separated from God. In the practice of FX, I have formed community that was unaware of God that began to talk about God and finally talk to God directly.

A great deal was covered during our group discussion in this final workshop by employing DeBono's Six Thinking Hats tool.³⁵⁸ I served as the "conductor" wearing the blue hat to guide the conversation as we thought about thinking through what had been covered in previous weeks and how to move forward. The "white hat" conversation began with listing the things we know about discipleship. Responses are paraphrased in what follows: bible study, called to do it. A directive, go make. Bringing people in, outward, close or far away, multifaceted, more knowledge, by education, most effective have been through relationship, not taught relational evangelism/discipleship. Teach, teach. Can't be good disciple until you are knowledgeable, leave it to the professionals. You must be qualified to lead a class/trained. You must be firm in own faith to lead. Feel unworthy to lead, don't talk about hard topics. Fear vs. invitation, needs to be more invitational, call to action.

³⁵⁸ Bono, De Edward. *Six Thinking Hats*. London, UK: Penguin Life, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2017.

The yellow hat encouraged participants to share positives in current models. The following was shared: relationship building with other Christians, time in word, seeing changed lives, facilitates growth for some, assumption that everyone that “comes,” growing seekers (come in doors) into mature Christians. Our comfort zones. Our terms.

The black hat challenged participants to identify difficulties in current system. The following were listed: Less coming to church. A lot to organize around. Could put self in harm's way. Lack of flexibility. One approach-come to church. Lack of commitment, someone else will do it. How church is viewed as whole.

The fifth hat or red hat provided an opportunity for participants to share their feeling about discipleship. Mental health, sense of inadequacy. You will never feel ready-but you are. God is with us—be willing to go—you will never feel ready. Lack of mutuality. Feelings about current reality of discipleship-Scary. We are asleep. Intimidating. Talk a lot about it but don't do anything. Church tries to do too many good things, and none well. Not enough emphasis on discipleship—sending, responsibility, reliance, lack of reliance. Joy when we make a connection. No sense of urgency to share. No responsibility to others.

Finally, wearing the green hat provided an opportunity to share ideas about how to move forward. Here the Lotus Blossom, a brainstorm tool, was utilized to capture ideas about what elements are necessary for effective discipleship. While the group named seven of the eight possibilities to fill out the blossom, the ways to make these ideas practical were tackled in groups that they were split into. What struck me most about this exercise was the theme captured by the groups that both surprised and troubled me. What they shared pointed significantly to a crisis of formation and is more basic and

foundational than expected. Characteristics like sacrifice, humility, life together, listening were a few things named. There is further investigation that needs to be done in this area.

Upon completion of week five participants were encouraged to investigate and consider how people prepare for different roles and work in fields outside the church. That conversation helped draw connections to the role of a disciple and what might be lacking in our discipleship models and emphasized the following: consistency, coach, regiment, different types of training, class/on the job training, apprenticeship, internship, practice, role playing, storytelling, exhibition. Preseason game. Individual practice as team importance of listening in sales.

Journal Prompts

At the close of each of the workshops, participants were given time to journal and reflect on how what they heard and discussed might apply to their own life. The workbook I created for the participants included the weekly journal prompt and a place for them to record their responses. Overall, the group articulated that discipleship was taught through relationships. What follows are the key themes recorded in these responses.

Week One-*Who or what has influenced your understanding of what it means to be a disciple/follower of Jesus?* Participants listed: people in my life, relationships, mentors, pastors. Some listed experiences, such as dinner church, mission trips and working with marginalized.

Week Two-*In what ways has scripture informed your understanding of discipleship?* Participants shared: Learning to trust, Jesus leading by example, what it

means to have faith, Jesus's life as an example, authoritative, illustration of how to live, how Jesus taught, led, showed, and sent, how the early church loved, accepted, and shared. The direction given to early church on how to grow in Christ. The obedience, faith, and willingness of Christ.

Week Three-*How has the story of the Beguines challenged your ideas about clergy or professional Christians?* Responses were: The things we can teach, and share can be done so by anyone, not exclusively reserved for clergy. To some degree the Beguines were better able to share due to their lack of professional status. Participant 02 noted, "Better to see a sermon than to hear one." Two participants commented that authority and direction were God given and that they didn't have to be told or wait to be told.

Week Four-*How does the theology of missional ecclesiology frame your role in the body of Christ?* This question elicited a variety of responses. Participant 04 commented that they could do something (rather than nothing), and it would help in discipleship and not to constantly evaluate success or have a need for outside accolades. Discipleship, one shared, is not knowing Christian but being Christian in the world and seen as acting Christian. Others shared they felt more led to integrate more community involvement and realize all are God's servants, all called, all can serve. The church is missionary, I am the missionary, and I must cultivate the mission field daily everywhere I go. Another shared they felt impressed upon to pray for the Holy Spirit's direction and be in tune with the Spirit's promptings, to act, to be involved, and to trust without certainty of outcome. Finally, one participant shared they felt called to be more flexible in how they thought about discipleship and open to new challenges.

Week Five-How does pollination and its ecological implications challenge your understanding of effective and fruitful discipleship? Participant 03 said it made them aware of places God makes available to each of us to share love and God's story while being intentional to look for opportunities. In addition, they were impressed by how the bees worked together. Participant 06 reflected that a fruitful hive required a lot of different contacts outside the hive and that they had no sense of self but are "whole hive oriented." Participant 07 commented that the flower does not come to the hive! Participant 08 seemed to agree in saying that bees go outside the hive, find the perfect resources and operate communally and with no sense of hierarchy. They bring back nectar, not the flower. Participant 09 shared that though bees are sent outside the hive they return to share their findings, working and deciding over time as a group, and likened this to input from multiple bees (disciples). Participant 11 was impressed to strive to be of one mind and body and wondered how anyone knows if no one goes.

Week Six-What 3 things from this workshop will move you toward change? How will you go about that change? What will it look like? There seemed to be consensus that a daily practice of awareness and intention was essential. The significance of the Great Commission and the "GO!" imperative, and the importance of listening and the authority that God has already given were listed as essential. One participant shared, "You don't have to be or feel like an expert." In a nutshell, another shared that they were thinking more practically about discipleship in the rhythms of everyday life.

Post-Workshop Interviews

There was a great deal of synergy in what was shared across the post-workshop interviews when asked the following: 1. What module had the greatest impact on you? Why? 2. What sort of resourcing might be helpful to you as an apprentice of Jesus as you seek to be more fruitful? What tools or resourcing might be beneficial to churches forming more holistic discipleship processes?

Though the Beguines and the bees fascinated participants, most shared that the missional ecclesiology module had the greatest impact on them as they considered their understanding of discipleship and the challenges named over the course of our time together. In considering helpful resources to grow to become a more fruitful apprentice of Jesus, participants shared that opportunities to practice what they were learning with a time to reflect and debrief in community would be helpful. Also named were opportunities for “God talk” or story sharing and testimony. As was shared previously one participant commented that even in their Sunday school class, they did not know what God was doing in the lives of those they gathered with. Finally, when asked about tools or resourcing that might be beneficial to churches forming more holistic discipleship processes, all the participants commented that taking leaders in existing churches through these modules would be beneficial to moving the needle. These workshops can initiate conversation, practices, and experiments that are contextually appropriate while moving churches toward more holistic discipleship processes.

Conclusion

The research prior to the execution of the project laid a foundation and supported the proposed solution of integrating FX into our discipleship processes to address the

gaps created by an internally focused, academic, and curriculum-based models employed by the institutional church. The focus on John 21:1-14, the pioneering movement of beguine laywomen, and missional ecclesiology supported the hypothesis and provided the integrity necessary to address possible objections. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary field of ecology and the impact of pollinating honeybees on their environment and the environment on hives provided a helpful illustration for effective discipleship.

Though the project is complete I feel as though I have just brushed the surface. It is my hope that this contributes to the conversation about FX as no one is focusing on the implications for discipleship and practice in the existing church. I am pleased with the outcomes of the project and the possibilities they point to for further study, designing new processes and models for discipleship in post-Christendom, and coaching existing churches toward a more holistic approach. Those that participated articulated a new excitement about making disciples and an urgency to be a part of the solution. Additionally, I was encouraged to take these workshops to other churches to initiate new approaches and practices to discipleship.

Through employing various tools, I was pleased with the amount of data I was able to collect though I believe further research is needed. Unfortunately, due to the immaturity of the FX movement in the North Georgia Conference of the UMC there was minimal engagement in the Fruitfulness Framework Survey that sought to provide a comparative analysis between that of respondents in the UK movement. I hope to return to the survey in the future to continue to measure fruitfulness and gain additional data to further inform the design of discipleship processes within the existing church and FX of

church. In addition, I envision the possibility of adapting the survey as a coaching tool as churches consider how current processes facilitate these practices and postures.

The questionnaires laid the groundwork for the workshops ahead and provided an opportunity for reflection on the underlying disconnects in our understanding of discipleship. The responses elicited both my interest and further reflection on the postures and practices of a gathered people and a sent people. Further, the responses highlighted the often insular and individualistic ideas we have about discipleship and the ways in which the institutional church has perpetuated these messages.

The group discussions returned great rewards with robust conversation that appeared to name an itch that needed to be scratched. They provided timely feedback and endorsed practical ways to apply what was being learned. In the future I would allow for more time for discussion and break participants into groups to potentially invite further data as we often seemed pressed for time.

Finally, the post-workshop interviews were very encouraging as participants unanimously agreed that the missional ecclesiology module was most impactful. In addition, I was encouraged by the enthusiasm shared for taking these workshops to other churches and leadership teams to move others to think differently about their discipleship paradigms and models. I look forward to future opportunities to do that. Often arguments are made for FX in terms of the end game, however the process of starting and practice of sustaining FX bring renewal to the body of Christ and to the individuals that are a part of it in each part of the journey.

In closing, I found this entire process to be inspiring. I have greater confidence in the gifts God has given me and the unique calling God has on my life for the church at

such a time as this. I am grateful to be a part of the FX movement, one of many like it inspired by the Holy Spirit, that will reshape the church in our rapidly changing world. The decline that preceded the global pandemic has only been accelerated in its aftermath. The maps that got us here won't get us to where we need to go. God is inviting us to cast the net on the other side and do an old thing in a new way. May God be glorified as we respond in faithfulness!

APPENDIX A

FRUITFULNESS FRAMEWORK SURVEY UK

Fresh Expressions of Church: Fruitfulness Framework report



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Executive Summary

The Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help Fresh Expression Church (FXC) leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC community. Instead of just counting 'bums on seats' the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants' lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC's vision, and with their local context.

This report presents the methodology behind this framework, as well pilot responses from 19 FXCs and 218 community members.

Fruitfulness framework results

With God

Our research examined how Fresh Expressions churches influenced three aspects of participants' relationship with God: (1) their commitment to exploring God, (2) the ways in which they engaged with God, and (3) the extent to which they felt connected to God. Encouragingly, Fresh Expressions seemed to have brought respondents closer to God in all three of these areas. For example:

- While less than half of participants (49 per cent) claimed to feel spiritually alive when they first joined their church, more than eight in ten (86 per cent) said the same afterward.
- Over eight in ten respondents (86 per cent) agreed that their FXC had improved their relationship with God, while almost half (47 per cent) strongly agreed.

With Self

Similarly, the questionnaire dealt with three aspects of participants' relationship with themselves: the extent to which they desired to be authentic, addressed personal issues, and had seen evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit. Participants indicated that they had seen at least some improvement in each. For example:

- The share who reported feeling peaceful increased from 50 to 87 per cent, while the proportion who felt worthy rose from 45 to 84 per cent.
- Just under nine in ten (88 per cent) agreed that their church had improved their personal life.

With FXC members

The research considered three aspects of participants' relationship with other FXC members: their desire to empower others in their church, the extent to which they felt connected to other members, and feelings of love and belonging within congregations. For example:

- 95 per cent of respondents saw their churches as safe places in which to have questions and doubts.
- Seven in ten (70 per cent) said they were being disciplined at least monthly – roughly the same percentage which said that they were disciplining others.
- 97 per cent said they feel a sense of belonging frequently in their Fresh Expressions churches.

With FXC vision

Participants reported that they identified with their churches' vision, and wanted to commit to making this vision a reality. Nonetheless, their actual contributions to their churches often lagged somewhat behind their commitment.

- Although only 42 per cent of respondents thought they had something to contribute before joining Fresh Expressions, 82 per cent agreed that they had something to give at the time of the survey.
- 79 per cent of participants reported wanting to try new things and take risks – nearly double the 39 per cent who said the same before joining a Fresh Expressions church.
- Most participants (88 per cent) said that Fresh Expressions had improved their vision of the church, while only 76 per cent agreeing that it did so in a way that recognised their gifts and skills.

With context

On the whole, participants reported that their relationship with their wider communities had improved as a result of belonging to a Fresh Expressions church. This was especially the case for respondents' ability to share their faith with their communities and for communities' awareness of and support for Fresh Expressions churches. For example:

- While fewer than half of participants (48 per cent) agreed with the statement 'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life' before joining the FXC, three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with it at the time of the survey.

Learnings and recommendations

To understand the data in greater depth, we also disaggregated it by variables including age, gender, and responses to other survey questions. Our analysis revealed the following trends:

- Participants who felt that their FXC asked them to serve in a way which recognised their gifts and skills were twice as likely to see personal change as those who did not.
- FXC members who felt their FXC had impacted their social lives were also more than twice as likely to have experienced personal change.
- Participants who were new to church (i.e., who had never previously attended church, or who had not attended church in the last two years) saw the most change. These differences derived from the fact that respondents who had not previously attended church tended to give themselves lower scores for the period before they attended an FXC; their scores at the time of taking the survey were comparable to those of other respondents.
- Participants who had previously attended church did score 5–15 per cent higher on measures of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and reading the Bible.
- Younger congregation members were slightly more likely to experience change than older members. The group most likely to report personal change was respondents between the ages of 25 and 34.
- Churches with a higher proportion of women were slightly more likely to see change across all their members than those with more even distributions. This is likely to be skewed by three or four churches with very high proportions of men or women.

- Respondents from smaller churches reported more personal change. This was only a slight difference, but it suggests that larger churches may not always be at an advantage in helping members grow spiritually.

Conclusions

If FXCs are going to be able to stand up to criticisms of being based 'on a defective methodology', there needs to be a robust definition of success as well as a system to capture and evaluate their impact. The Fruitfulness Framework has in many ways achieved this goal. As the first part of this report showed, through a literature review and practitioner focus groups, a clear set of measurable success outcomes have been created. Similarly, the Fruitfulness Framework is a tool that enables FXC leaders to measure their communities' growth and change across these outcomes.

If you would like to see the Church of England's commentary and information on the Fruitfulness Framework, [follow this link to visit the Church of England website](#), or scan this code:



Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

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Introduction

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Since its conception, Fresh Expressions of Church (FXCs) have received a variety of endorsements as well as criticism from christians and established church bodies in the United Kingdom. On the one hand the movement has been praised as a contemporary and highly impactful way to engage with local unchurched and dechurched communities. Whilst on the other hand they have been labelled as an "abandonment of stability for novelty and given liturgy for 'choice'", resulting in "banality and pastiche, as well as a frail and atomized subjectivity".

However, as is all too common within church and Christian circles, these debates rely extensively on subjective criteria and vague and varying definitions of success. Here there is no clear definition, with measurable outcomes, as to what a successful or unsuccessful FXC might look like. Similarly, when evaluating whether these outcomes have been achieved, arguments resort to the subjective realms of philosophy and theology (as in Davidson and Millbank's critique of Fresh Expressions), or to high-level outputs, 'bums on seats', and anecdotes (as in Church Army's 'Evidence about fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England' report in 2015).¹

Whilst both types of evidence are valuable in their own right, they must be appreciated in combination with clear definitions of success, as well as clear robust impact evidence. This is what the Fruitfulness Framework, and this report, aim to do.

Fruitfulness framework

Based upon an extensive literature review, as well as several workshops with FXC practitioners, the Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help FXC leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC Community. Instead of just counting 'bums on seats' the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants' lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC's vision, and with their local context.

Within each of these dimensions, the framework asks about participant beliefs, behaviours, and experiences.

The framework was used with a pilot sample of 19 FXC communities (consisting of 478 participants) across the United Kingdom. This framework creation and use was done with the following main research questions and research purposes in mind.

Research questions

Based upon an extensive literature review, as well as several workshops with FXC practitioners, the Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help FXC leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC Community. Instead of just counting 'bums on seats' the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants' lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC's vision, and with their local context.

What does a 'Fruitful' FXC look like?

A first vital step in measuring success is to be able to define it. For this reason the first main question this project asked was 'what does a Fruitful FXC look like?'. This question looked at both the large definition of fruitfulness, as well as the specific measurable indicators of this concept.

To what extent are FXCs being fruitful?

Having answered the first question, this project then asked to what extent are FXCs being fruitful? As already discussed, this question was an important one to answer objectively and without specific dogmas having influence, or preconceived conclusions being made.

How can we improve their impact in the future?

Looking to the future of FXCs in the United Kingdom, as well as their relationship with both mainstream Church and secular society, this final question looked at ways to improve the impact of FXCs.

¹ Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

² Ungu, G. 2015. *Evidence about fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England*.

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Research purpose

The purpose of answering these questions were as follows:

Provide FXC leaders with a tool to measure and improve impact

Leaders of faith-based organisations often struggle to define success, and therefore objectively know whether it is happening or not. By providing leaders of FXCs with a tailor made Fruitfulness Framework, it enables them to define and measure their success on an ongoing basis. This in turn will drive an improved impact strategy, increase motivation and funding based upon areas of strength, and improve areas of weakness for these FXCs.

Celebrate the collective impact of FXCs across the UK

This project will also enable the UK church to understand and celebrate the areas of strength of FXCs across the UK. Whilst anecdotes of failure and success fill conversations surrounding FXCs, data from this project will enable a fresh perspective and a fair celebration of their accomplishments.

Identify fruitful FXCs to learn from through further research

Finally, data from this project will enable the Church of England to identify some of the most fruitful FXCs across the country. This will enable them to pursue a deeper understanding from these FXCs of the key steps and tools to creating this success.

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Methodology

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Framework design

High-level literature review

As has been previously described, the first main step of the methodology behind this project was to define what a 'fruitful' FXC might look like. A good starting point for this process involved a high-level review of FXC literature and relevant surveys and studies.

Based upon the original definition of FXCs as 'new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church', there are 'several key features' that unite them.⁴ These four features are widely known as contextual (i.e. listening to people and being alongside them in their culture), missional (i.e. serving people outside church), ecclesial (i.e. forming a church), and formational (i.e. making discipleship a priority) features. Whilst highly conceptual these four features provide a great starting point for any outcomes framework of a FXC. Similarly, within the Church of England, the Greenhouse project empowers new FXC leaders with the 'Listening First Missional Journey' strategy, aiming to keep 'Greenhouse Teams focused and intentional as they work towards their mission goals'. This journey follows a cyclical process of 'listen', 'love', 'community', 'share to life', 'church', and 'repeat'.⁵

Whilst both of these frameworks provide high-level concepts from which to start to define success, there also already exist several sets of indicators and tools to measure some of these outcomes. Within the Fresh Expression movement, one example of this is Steve Taylor's 'Seedling Annual Reflection Tool'.⁶ This tool asks participants to list '1 or 2 things' that they see occurring in their community, ranging from 'listening and connecting' (i.e. Seedling team members spend time in local

⁴ Fresh Expressions, 2021. 'What is a Fresh Expression?'. Available online at: <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/what-is-fe/>.

⁵ Church of England, 2021. 'All about Greenhouse'. Available online at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions/what-greenhouse>.

⁶ Taylor, S. 2020. 'Paying attention: The Seedling Annual reflection tool'.

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community – walking, praying, listening), through to 'Structures' (i.e. Signs of support and interest from wider church). Likewise, within the Church of England, the Church Development Tool (formerly known as the Big Church Survey) is an annual survey that will be used to measure subjective congregation engagement with their church and their church's mission.

Finally, and looking more widely towards the academic fields of sociology and theology, there is extensive literature on the various domains of an individual's faith. Most recently, Richards et al. completed a factor analysis of 34 aspects of faith to identify key themes. They then created a metric consisting of three main areas: love of God, love of others, and love of self. These factors went on to form the subscales of their 17-item Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey (TSOS). Likewise, there are several Christian theological writers (e.g., Mead, 2007; Olthuis, 2006) who have also suggested that relationship with God, relationship with others, and transformation, acceptance, and development of the self are core themes throughout the whole Bible, and thus should be the core themes of this framework.

Focus groups and online questionnaire

Following this high-level review of literature surrounding FXCs a more grounded approach was taken with current practitioners in the UK. This involved conducting two focus groups, as well as an online questionnaire, with 20 current FXC leaders. All leaders were asked to simply define, in their own words, what they felt a fruitful FXC looked like.

Secondly, leaders were provided with a more structural framework to work with, and were asked to think about the changed beliefs, behaviours, and experiences of both FXC leaders, as well as FXC participants. This second approach provided more insightful responses, with respondents highlighting a wide range of key indicators they would expect to see in each of these six main categories.

In total there were well over 100 indicators and concepts that were mentioned by leaders for both FXC leadership as well as FXC participants.

⁷ Church of England, 2021. 'Church Development Tool'. Available online at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe/advent-and-christmas/mission-network-news/church-development-tool>.

⁸ Richards, P. Smith, Schrevelier, M. and Richard, M. 2005. 'Development and Validation of the Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey'. *Psychotherapy Research - PSYCHOTHER RES.* 15, 457-469.

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Fruitfulness Framework

Based upon the literature review, as well as the focus group responses, the following Fruitfulness Framework was developed. As has been previously described, the framework revolves around five main dimensions of participants' lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC's vision, and with their local context. As the following table shows, these dimensions are each rooted in the core features of a FXC.

DIMENSION	FRESH EXPRESSION	CONCEPTS AND DESCRIPTION
With God	Formational	Members are committed to following God. They are growing as disciples of Jesus through their contact with the Fresh Expression. They describe themselves as a Christian and own this as part of their identity. They are growing in faith and knowledge in how they relate with God.
With Self	Formational	Members are flourishing personally. They are addressing issues in their own life, addiction, debt, mental health, etc. They experience inner joy, peace, hope, etc.
With FXC members	Formational	Members are connecting, including, listening, and supporting each other spiritually and emotionally. They are able to ask for support from each other. Members experience a high level of belonging and acceptance from one another. They feel valued and challenged.
With FXC vision	Ecclesial	Members are committed to the vision and the practices of their FXC. They intend to become disciples of their FXC, as well as contribute their time, skills, and resources to developing contextual spiritual practices.
With context	Missional and contextual	Members are made up of individuals who do not normally attend church. They seek to fit and reach the culture of their local context. They engage the local context, both socially and spiritually. They feel equipped and confident to speak about their faith with others, and are happy to invite people to events or services at their church. They are able to relate theology to the secular.

A more detailed description of this framework is shown below. For each of the key concepts described within each dimension, a measurable (or set of measurable) indicators is provided in the final column. It is from this column that the resulting Fruitfulness Framework questionnaire can be developed.

DIMENSION	CONCEPT	INDICATOR
With God	Commitment to exploring God	Commitment to explore following God and to follow the Holy Spirit (beyond self-curiosity).
	Engaging with God personally	Meaningful and personal engagement with God outside of the communal times (Bible, prayer, meditation, worship).
	Experiencing connection with God	Experiencing God's presence, closeness, connection, as well as thankfulness towards God.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
With Self	Desire to be authentic	Desire and ability (developed over time) to trust, be honest, and be authentic.
	Desire to be vulnerable and humble	Desire to be vulnerable, humble, and learn from failure.
	Addressing personal issues	Addressing issues in their own life, addiction, debt, mental health, etc.
	Experiencing fruits of the Spirit	Experiencing inner joy, peace, hope, etc.
With FXC members	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
	Desire to empower FXC members	Desire to include, share power with, empower, and grow, other participants. Not being 'preoccupied' about role.
	Desire to be relational and reflective	Desire to reflect on themselves, and desire to understand their impact and potential impact upon others.
	Connecting with other FXC members	Connecting, including, listening, asking for help, and supporting each other spiritually and emotionally.
With FXC vision	Experiencing love and belonging	Experiencing that they can show up and be completely themselves, feel accepted as who they are by the community.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
	Desire to commit and participate	Desire to contribute and take part with their FXC through a variety of resources. Knowledge and belief that they have something to contribute.
	Desire to be adventurous	Desire to be adventurous, and experiment, and try new things.
With context	Developing contextual practices	Contributing to their FXC with their skills and talents, as well as with their offerings and time. Contributing to their FXC with finances and material support and donations.
	Contributing to their FXC	Contributing to their FXC with their skills and talents, as well as with their offerings and time. Contributing to their FXC with finances and material support and donations.
	Experiencing growth and vision of FXC	Experiencing a strong sense of purpose, vision, and growth.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
With context	Vision for local contextual impact	Vision and desire for God to work through them and impact the local community.
	Sharing God with context	Sharing about the difference that God is making in your life (developed over time).
	Connecting with context	Connecting, including, listening, and supporting the local reached and unreached community spiritually and emotionally.
	Seeing local context responding	Local community invites their FXC to do, is asking questions, is asking for help, and feels welcome and listened to by their FXC.
With context	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.

Impact evaluation design

Having designed the framework from which to measure success the next key stage of this project was to design the methodology for measuring impact. This involved choosing an evaluation methodology, defining the key research population, and developing a reporting system that would be useful to leaders on the ground.

Retrospective pre-test design

Given that FXCs have been established for a while across the country, as well as the need to avoid response shift bias in responses, a retrospective pre-test design was chosen for this project.

An RPT administers both the pre- and post-test measurements after the intervention. This approach asks participants to assess their skills, knowledge, or personal qualities as they were before joining, or just after joining, the FXC and as they are at the point of taking the assessment.

This approach has been shown to be as robust and accurate as a longitudinal design. Indeed, in their review of the literature, Rong Chang and Todd Little (2018), from the College of Education, Institute for Measurement, Methodology, Analysis, and Policy at Texas Tech University, conclude that "pretest data collected at the posttime provide a highly reliable and valid reflection of participants' true preintervention levels and thereby provide very precise estimation of participants' perceived changes due to the programme effects" (2018, 10).

However, RPTs are not immune from their own forms of potential bias. With this design, there was a danger that responses would bias towards social desirability or confirm respondents' own desired journey of transformation. Since respondents want there to be a change in their lives, and know the FXC wants to see change, there was the potential that their baseline measurements would be exaggeratedly low, while their current measurements would be exaggeratedly high.

With this in mind, the wording of the questionnaire and the method of delivery were consciously designed to avoid social desirability bias.

Firstly, all responses were advertised as confidential and anonymous, with the FXC leader never being able to see responses from individual participants. Secondly, the research invitation letter, as well as subsequent emails, made it clear that this was a space to make responses as brutally honest as possible. Participants were strongly encouraged to be critical and explicitly warned against writing what they thought the FXC "wanted" to hear. Thirdly, the research was conducted by an external, non-religious organisation to add a level of objectivity and external critique.

Demographics

- 216 people responded to this survey, representing 19 FXC churches from across the country.
- Of those giving a binary gender, 71 of respondents were female, and 29 percent were male.
- 9 percent of respondents were under 25, 12 percent were over 65. The most common age band was 35-44 with 29 percent of respondents.
- 88 percent of respondents were white.
- 25 percent of respondents had attended their FXC for 5 years or more, 50 percent of respondents had attended their FXC for 2 to 4 years, 25 percent had attended for less than 2 years.
- 29 percent had not been a part of a church in the last 2 years prior to joining the FXC, and these respondents are analysed separately in a section towards the end of the report.

Population and sampling

Whilst focus groups had highlighted that both leaders and participants of FXCs were important stakeholders when it came to measuring success, there was a general consensus that participants were the priority in this process. With this in mind, the Fruitfulness Framework methodology was designed to be administered by FXC leaders and completed by FXC participants of their community.

In early 2021 a wide range of FXC leaders across the country were notified that there would be the opportunity to take part in this research. With a limited number of 50 places available, leaders were invited to sign-up to the process via the Fruitfulness Framework website. Over several weeks cll 50 places were taken by FXC leaders who were then given the specific instructions to administer the online questionnaire with their communities.

Ethical concerns

A vital step in finalising the methodology and questionnaire was to ensure high ethical standards.

Given the highly personal nature of the research, there were several ethical considerations and precautions that were taken in line with the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice.

Firstly, all data collected was voluntary. Participants were given the option of not partaking in the research in the retrospective surveys.

Secondly, to create a "safe space" to allow participants to be completely honest, all questionnaire data collected was anonymous and stored on encrypted hard-drives.

Thirdly, if participants were experiencing any forms of hurt and life difficulties and this was brought up through the research process, participants were directed to the Samaritans charity for counselling and support.

Response rate and representativeness

Out of the 50 leaders who signed-up to take part in the research, 19 actually pursued the opportunity and circulated the online questionnaire with their communities. From these 19 FXCs, a total of 478 participants were approached by their leader to complete the online questionnaire. 51 per cent of these participants responded and completed the questionnaire.

There was a trend towards early responders being more enthusiastic to report positive personal change than those who responded later. This was true both at the church level (churches who responded first in the sample) and at the member level (members who responded first within their churches). This means that there is likely to be some bias in the data towards those who have seen change and that those who did not respond are likely to have had less encouraging experiences than those who did. It is therefore not correct to say that this data perfectly represents all FXC churches in the UK, or even all of the churches who responded - except for the limited number of churches who received responses from 100% of their congregation members.

This being said, given the lack of bias in response based upon gender, age, and geography of FXCs and participants, the following results can be seen as indicative of the changes that are occurring in the lives of participants across the country.

National results

4

With God

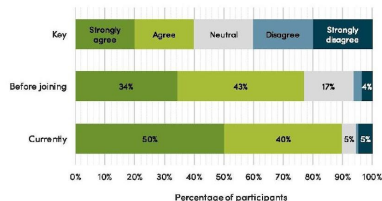
Our research examined how Fresh Expressions churches influenced three aspects of participants' relationship with God: (1) their commitment to exploring God, (2) the ways in which they engaged with God, and (3) the extent to which they felt connected to God. Encouragingly, Fresh Expressions seemed to have brought respondents closer to God in all three of these areas.

Commitment to exploring God

While only 77 per cent of participants said that they wanted to explore their faith in God when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, 90 per cent agreed by the time they took the survey – with one in two respondents (50 per cent) strongly agreeing.

'I want to explore my faith in God'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to explore my faith in God'



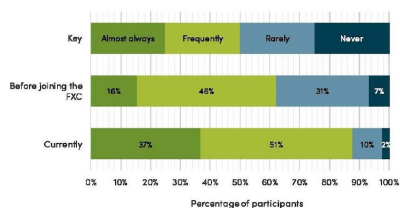
17

Experiencing connection with God

Perhaps as a result of spending more time praying and reading the Bible, the extent to which participants felt connected to God had also markedly increased. After joining a Fresh Expressions church, participants found it easier to see the difference God had made in their lives, and more frequently felt spiritually alive and aware of God's love.

'I could see the difference that God has made in my life'

The graph shows the frequency that participants could see the difference that God has made in their lives



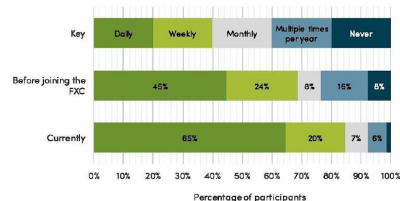
Some of these differences were remarkable: while only 62 per cent reported seeing the difference that God made in their lives when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, 88 per cent said they could see this difference currently. Likewise, while less than half of participants (49 per cent) claimed to feel spiritually alive when they first joined their church, more than eight in ten (86 per cent) said the same afterward.

19

Engaging with God personally

'I pray personally'

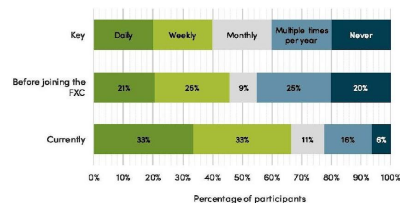
The graph shows the frequency that participants prayed



These respondents had also begun to change how they related to God, with 65 per cent praying daily after joining a Fresh Expressions church (as compared to 45 per cent at the point of joining), and nearly two-thirds (66 per cent) reading their Bible at least once a week. This represented a 20-percentage-point increase on the proportion of respondents who had previously read the Bible weekly.

'I read the Bible'

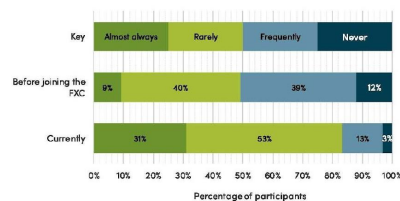
The graph shows the frequency that participants read the Bible



18

'I felt spiritually alive'

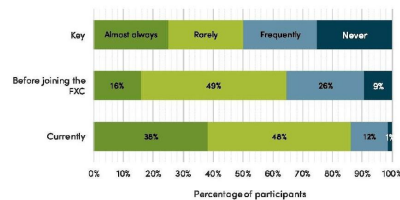
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'spiritually alive' during a typical month



Interestingly, this transformation was most evident in the share of respondents who said they 'almost always' experienced these markers of closeness with God. The proportions who said that they almost always could see the difference that God had made in their lives and feel God's love more than doubled, while the percentage who said they almost always felt spiritually alive more than tripled – from 9 per cent at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church to 31 per cent at the time of the survey.

'I felt God's love'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'God's love' over a typical month



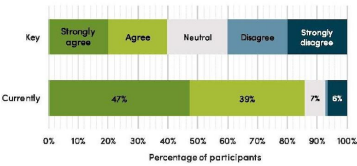
20

Causality

Perhaps most encouragingly, participants attributed many of these changes in their relationship with God to their Fresh Expressions church. Well over eight in ten respondents (86 per cent) agreed that their church had improved their relationship with God, while almost half (47 per cent) strongly agreed.

'My FXC has positively impacted my relationship with God'

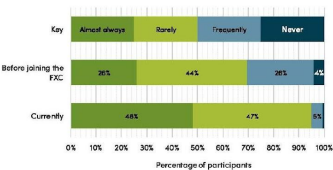
The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my relationship with God'



Addressing personal issues

'When they come up, I work to deal with the difficult issues in my life'

The graph shows the extent that participants were dealing with the difficult issues in their life (such as problems at home, mental health, addiction)

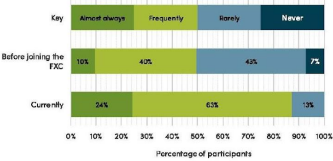


There were also smaller differences in the proportion of respondents who said that they dealt with difficult issues in their life. Whereas seven in ten (70 per cent) said they did so frequently when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, more than nine in ten (95 per cent) claimed to do so currently. The proportion who described themselves as almost always dealing with difficult issues also increased, from 26 to 48 per cent.

Experiencing Fruits of the Spirit

'I felt peaceful'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt peaceful during a typical month



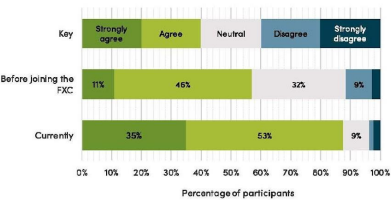
With self

Similarly, the questionnaire dealt with three aspects of participants' relationship with themselves: the extent to which they desired to be authentic, addressed personal issues, and had seen evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit. Although success was more marked in some of these areas than others, participants indicated that they had seen at least some improvement in each.

Desire to be authentic

'I want to be open with others about who I really am'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to be open with others about who I really am'

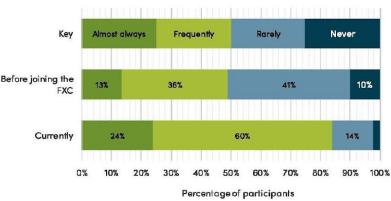


This improvement was particularly noticeable in the proportion of respondents who wanted to be open with others about who they really were. Whereas just 57 per cent of participants agreed with this statement when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, nearly nine in ten (86 per cent) agreed by the time they took the survey. Strikingly, the share of respondents who strongly agreed that they wanted to be open with others more than tripled, from 11 per cent at the point of joining Fresh Expressions to 35 per cent currently.

Furthermore, participants said they had improved on several measures designed to assess the Fruits of the Spirit. Most compellingly, the share who reported feeling peaceful increased from 50 to 87 per cent, while the proportion who felt worthy rose from 49 to 84 per cent.

'I felt worthy'

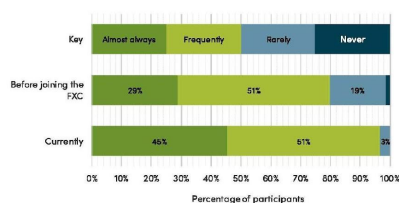
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'worthy' during a typical month



There was less change in the proportion who reported that their behaviour was in line with their values: although this rose slightly, from 80 to 96 per cent, most respondents seemed to believe that they were living in accordance with their values before joining a Fresh Expressions church.

'My behaviour was in line with my values'

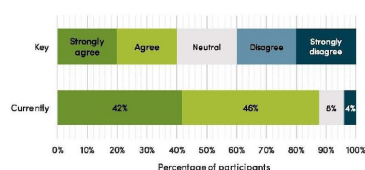
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their behaviour was in line with their values during a typical month



Causality

'My FXC has positively impacted my personal life'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my personal life'



25

With FXC members

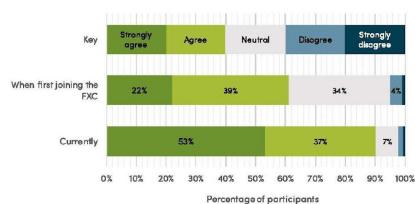
As in previous sections, the research considered three aspects of participants' relationship with other FXC members: their desire to empower others in their church, the extent to which they felt connected to other members, and feelings of love and belonging within congregations. Participants had grown in most of these areas since joining a Fresh Expressions church, although there was more limited progress on some measures of love and belonging.

Desire to empower FXC members

Our data showed clear improvement in the percentage of people who wanted others in their church to grow and take part in activities. While just over six in ten respondents (61 per cent) agreed with this statement when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, nine in ten (90 per cent) agreed at the point of taking the survey.

'I want other people in my FXC to grow and take part more'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want other people in my FXC to grow and take part more'



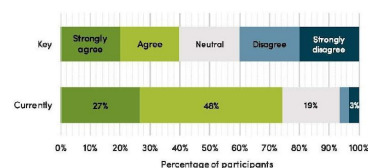
Participants had also become more open to being corrected by other members of their community, with 82 per cent saying they wanted others to challenge them if they did something 'wrong' – a 28-percentage-point increase on the share of respondents who said they would have been open to correction when they joined a Fresh Expressions church.

27

Once again, participants thought their church was responsible for much of the change described above, with just under nine in ten (88 per cent) agreeing that their church had improved their personal life. Respondents were somewhat less certain that their churches had equipped them for trying life circumstances: only three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with this statement.

'My FXC equips me for life's major challenges'

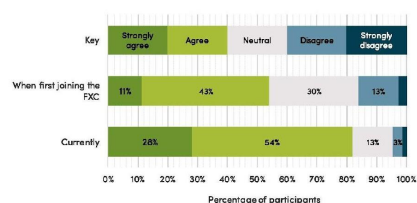
The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC equips me for life's major challenges (e.g. parenting, relationships, sickness and death)'



26

'I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong'

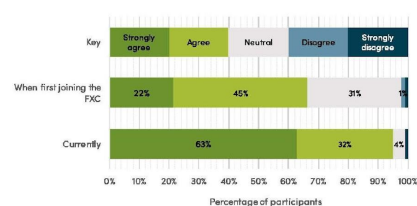
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong'



Perhaps as a result of this trust in other community members, 95 per cent of respondents saw their churches as safe places in which to have questions and doubts – another 28-percentage-point improvement. Impressively, the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement nearly tripled – from 22 per cent at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church to 63 per cent currently.

'My FXC is a safe place to have questions and doubts'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'my FXC is a safe place to have questions and doubts'

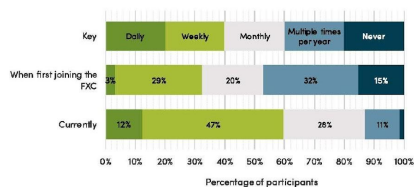


28

Connecting with other FXC members

'I have a meaningful conversation with another member of my FXC'

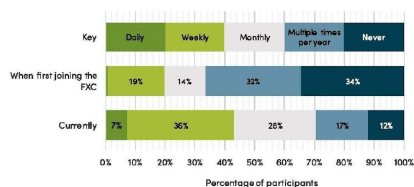
The graph shows the frequency that participants had a meaningful conversation with another member of their FXC



Most participants had regular, meaningful conversations with other members of their church. The proportion who had these conversations at least monthly rose from 52 to 67 per cent after joining a Fresh Expressions church, while the share who had these conversations daily quadrupled, from 3 to 12 per cent. As these figures indicate, members of Fresh Expression churches seemed to be genuinely involved in each other's lives.

'I meet other members of my FXC to help them grow in their lives'

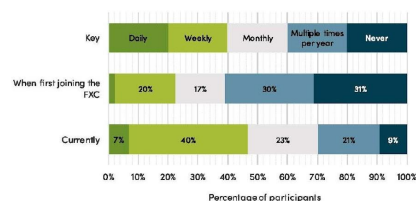
The graph shows the frequency that participants met other members of their FXC to help each other grow in their lives and faith



Respondents also seemed invested in helping other members of their church grow in their faith, with seven in ten (71 per cent) saying that they met with others at least monthly for this purpose. (An impressive 43 per cent also claimed to be discipling other members of their congregation at least once a week.) This represented an improvement on the percentage who had met with others when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church; previously, only 34 per cent said they met with other members their church at least monthly – the same proportion who said that they had never met with other members of their church at all.

'I meet other members of my FXC to help me grow in my life'

The graph shows the frequency that participants met other members of their FXC to help themselves grow in their lives and faith



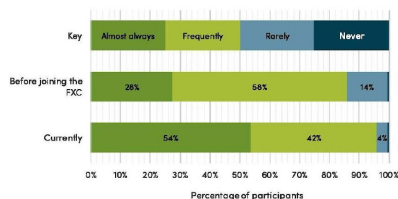
In addition to discipling others, participants were also being disciplined by other members of their congregation. Seven in ten (70 per cent) said they were being disciplined at least monthly – roughly the same percentage which said that they were discipling others. Once again, this constituted a significant improvement on the 39 per cent of participants who said that they had met others for this purpose when they joined a Fresh Expressions church.

29

Experiencing love and belonging

'I felt like helping others'

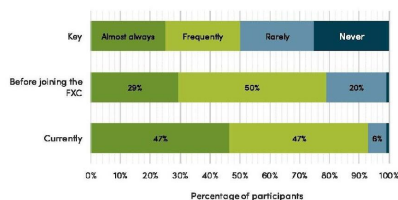
The graph shows the frequency that participants 'I felt like helping others'



Although a high percentage of participants (96 per cent) said they at least frequently felt like helping others, this percentage was also high (86 per cent) at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church. However, there was a marked difference in the share of respondents who said that they almost always felt like helping others, which nearly doubled from 28 to 54 per cent.

'I had feelings of love toward others'

The graph shows the frequency that participants 'had feelings of love toward others'



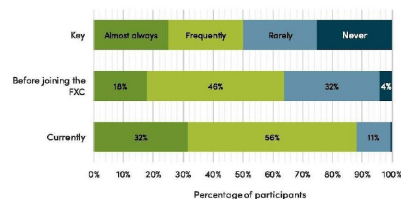
31

30

Changes in participants' feelings of love towards others were somewhat limited. The proportion of respondents who had these feelings at least frequently rose from 79 to 94 per cent, while the share who had them almost always increased from 29 to 47 per cent.

'I felt forgiveness toward others'

The graph shows the frequency that participants 'felt forgiveness toward others'

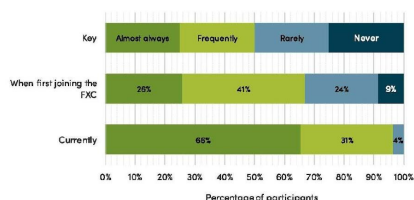


Improvements in respondents' feelings of forgiveness towards others, however, were slightly more marked. While only 64 per cent of participants said they frequently felt forgiveness for others at least frequently when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, this figure had risen to 88 per cent by the time of the survey. The proportion who said they almost always felt forgiveness had also increased appreciably, from 18 to 32 per cent.

32

'I feel a sense of belonging with my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt a sense of belonging with their FXC

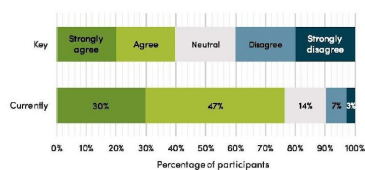


Encouragingly, participants tended to feel a sense of belonging in their Fresh Expressions churches, with 97 per cent saying they felt this way at least frequently. Once again, this improvement was clearest for those who said they "almost always" felt a sense of belonging: this share of participants more than doubled from 25 to 65 per cent after joining a Fresh Expressions church.

Causality

'My FXC has positively impacted my social life'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my social life'

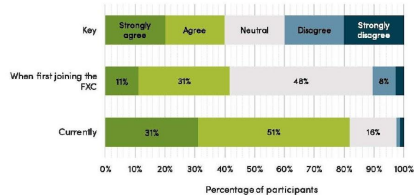


33

Participants were also considerably more likely to feel that they had something to contribute and to want to try new things after joining a Fresh Expressions church. Although only 42 per cent of respondents thought they had something to contribute before joining Fresh Expressions, 82 per cent agreed that they had something to give at the time of the survey. Likewise, 79 per cent of participants reported wanting to try new things and take risks – nearly double the 39 per cent who said the same before joining a Fresh Expressions church.

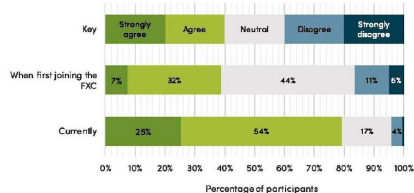
'I have something of value to contribute to my FXC'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I have something of value to contribute to my FXC'



'I want to try new things and take risks in my FXC'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to try new things and take risks in my FXC'



35

Despite these improvements, however, only 77 per cent of respondents felt that their Fresh Expressions church had enhanced their social life. This relatively low figure may reflect the fact that previous questions concentrated on whether Fresh Expressions churches had improved participants' relationships with other members of their church. Although Fresh Expressions did seem to build relationships between church members themselves, it may not always have aided their relationships with others they knew.

With FXC vision

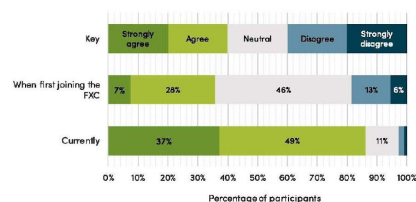
Participants reported that they identified with their churches' vision, and wanted to commit to making this vision a reality. Nonetheless, their actual contributions to their churches often lagged somewhat behind their commitment, and showed only modest increases in the amount of time, money, and energy that they were willing to dedicate to their churches' vision.

Desire to commit and participate

Not surprisingly, respondents were much more likely to understand their Fresh Expressions church's vision after they had spent some time at the church. Whereas only 35 per cent claimed to know this vision when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, this proportion had increased to 86 per cent by the time of the survey.

'I know the specific vision of my FXC'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I know the specific vision of my FXC'



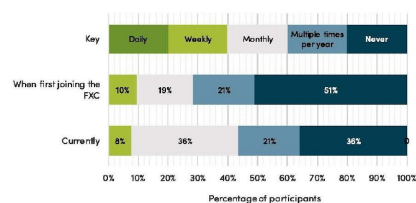
34

Contributing to their FXC

As described above, however, identification with the vision of Fresh Expressions churches did not always translate to tangible contributions of time and money. Although the proportion of respondents who gave money to their church at least monthly increased from 29 to 44 per cent, 36 per cent of participants continued to not give at all.

'I give money to my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants gave money to their FXC

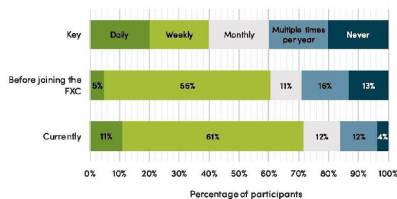


Gains in the share of participants who attended church at least weekly were also relatively modest: while 72 per cent of respondents said they attended church weekly, 59 per cent had already done so when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church.

36

'I attend church worship, either physically or online'

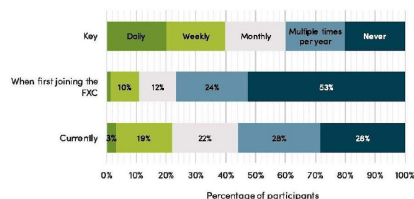
The graph shows the frequency that participants attend church worship, either physically or online



Data on the proportion of respondents who took part in planning, preparing, and leading activities, however, were more encouraging: two-thirds of participants (66 per cent) did so at least multiple times per year, an improvement on the 47 per cent of respondents who planned, prepared, or led activities when they joined a Fresh Expressions church. A high percentage of respondents (44 per cent) also claimed to be involved in leading in these activities at least monthly – nearly double the rate of monthly involvement at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church (23 per cent).

'I take part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in my FXC'

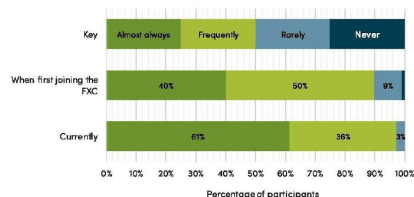
The graph shows the frequency that participants took part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in their FXC



37

'I wanted to make the world a better place'

The graph shows the frequency that participants wanted to make the world a better place, during a typical month

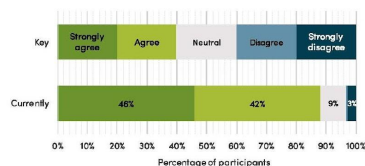


Causality

Furthermore, most participants (88 per cent) said that Fresh Expressions had improved their vision of the church. Respondents did, however, offer fainter praise for how their Fresh Expressions church asked them to serve, with only 76 per cent agreeing that it did so in a way that recognised their gifts and skills.

'My FXC has positively impacted my vision of church'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my vision of church'



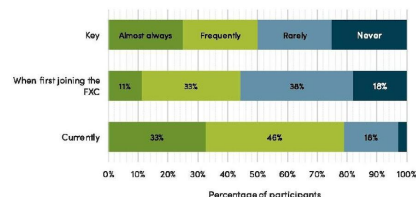
39

Experience growth and vision of FXC

Perhaps relatedly, participants were much more likely to report an increased sense of purpose after joining a Fresh Expressions church, with 79 per cent of respondents feeling that they at least frequently had a sense of purpose, as compared to the 44 per cent who agreed that they had a sense of purpose when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church.

'I felt I have a purpose in my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt they have a purpose in their FXC

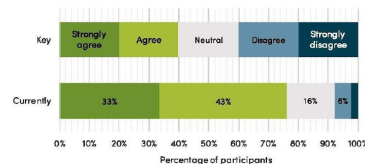


Interestingly, while Fresh Expressions did not appreciably increase the share of respondents who "frequently" wanted to make the world a better place, it did raise the proportion who wanted to do so "almost always" – from 40 to 61 per cent. Although Fresh Expressions was not responsible for respondents' desire to do good in the world, that is, it did seem to help them live in accordance with that desire more consistently.

38

'My FXC asks me to serve in a way which recognises my gifts'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC asks me to serve in a way which recognises my particular gifts and skills'



With context

On the whole, participants reported that their relationship with their wider communities had improved as a result of belonging to a Fresh Expressions church. This was especially the case for respondents' ability to share their faith with their communities and for communities' awareness of and support for Fresh Expressions churches. Participants did not, however, report large changes in the extent to which they volunteered in community activities or spent time with people from their area.

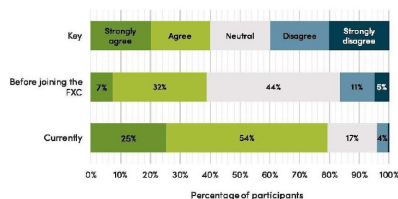
Sharing God with context

Respondents were much more likely to be interested in telling others about the difference God had made in their lives after joining a Fresh Expressions church: while fewer than half of participants (46 per cent) agreed with this statement when they joined their current church, three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with it at the time of the survey.

40

'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life'

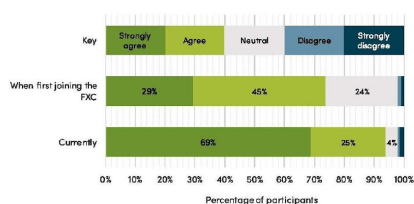
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life'



Respondents also said they had improved at integrating their faith with their everyday lives, and that they were more likely to want to make a difference in their communities. Here, the greatest difference was in the share of participants who strongly agreed that they wanted to make a difference while only 29 per cent did so when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, 69 per cent strongly agreed by the time they took the survey.

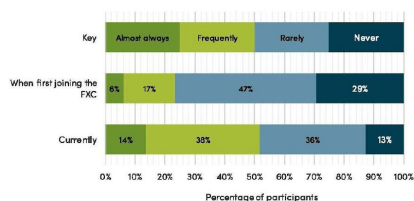
'My FXC wants to make a positive difference in our local context'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'my FXC wants to make a positive difference in our local context / local community'



'If asked, my neighbours know about our FXC and its activities'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their neighbours would know about their FXC



Even this figure, however, remained relatively low in absolute terms: while 52 per cent of respondents now thought their neighbours frequently knew about their church and its activities (as opposed to 23 per cent when they joined their church), this still signifies that just under half of participants (45 per cent) believed that their communities were rarely or never aware of their church.

More encouragingly, participants believed that they were getting to know what people in their community hoped for and needed:

Connecting with context

Since belonging to a Fresh Expressions church, participants had increased the frequency with which they met with people from the wider community, participated in or found out about local community needs, and volunteered in community projects. These changes are shown in the table below.

DIMENSION	PER CENT AT LEAST MONTHLY BEFORE JOINING AN FXC	PER CENT AT LEAST MONTHLY AFTER JOINING AN FXC
Meeting up with people from the wider community	52%	69%
Participating in or finding out about current local community issues and needs	48%	65%
Volunteer in a local community project	28%	45%

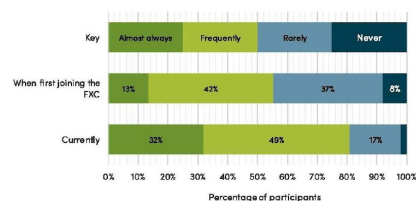
While these changes are not as dramatic as some of the others discussed in this report, they were not insignificant: respondents were much more likely not merely to spend time with others in their community, but to also participate in activities that required an investment of energy, such as volunteering in community projects.

Seeing local context responding

Most participants thought the wider community had responded favourably to their Fresh Expressions churches. Although there was little change in the proportion of respondents who thought that members of the local community were made to feel welcome when they attended church, participants emphasised that their neighbours were now much more likely to know about their Fresh Expressions church and its activities.

'We know what people in our community hope for and need'

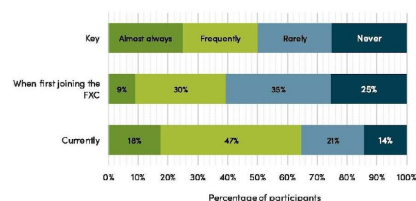
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt they knew what people in their community hoped for and need



They could also think of examples when the local community had supported their church: whereas only 39 per cent of respondents could "frequently" think of these examples when they first joined their Fresh Expressions church, this had increased to 65 per cent by the time of the survey.

'The local community has actively supported my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their local community had actively supported their FXC during a typical month

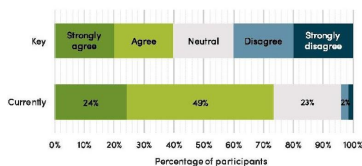


Causality

As above, many participants emphasised that their Fresh Expressions churches had directly caused the changes considered in this section. More than seven in ten respondents (73 per cent) said that their Fresh Expressions church had helped them identify how they could serve God in other areas of their lives – such as in the workplace or through community groups – while another 73 per cent affirmed that their churches had improved how they engaged with their communities. Although these percentages are relatively high, they may still leave room for improvement: 23 and 21 per cent of respondents (respectively) neither agreed nor disagreed that their churches helped them in these areas, suggesting that some Fresh Expressions churches could benefit from helping members connect more effectively with their communities.

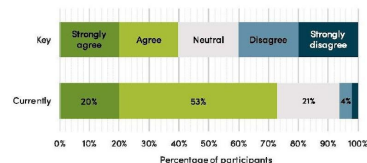
'My FXC helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles (e.g. workplace or community groups)'



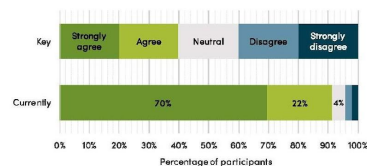
'My FXC has positively impacted how I engage with the community'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted how I engage with the local community'



'My FXC is a place where occasional visitors are made to feel welcome'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC is a place where occasional visitors are made to feel welcome'



45

Bivariate analysis

5

To understand the data in greater depth, we also disaggregated it by variables including age, gender, and responses to other survey questions. Our analysis revealed the following trends:

Participants who felt that their FXC asked them to serve in a way which recognised their gifts and skills were twice as likely to see personal change as those who did not.

FXC members who felt their FXC had impacted their social lives were also more than twice as likely to have experienced personal change.

Younger congregation members were slightly more likely to experience change than older members. The group most likely to report personal change was respondents between the ages of 25 and 34.

Churches with a higher proportion of women were slightly more likely to see change across all their members than those with more even distributions. This is likely to be skewed by three or four churches with very high proportions of men or women.

Respondents from smaller churches reported more personal change. This was only a slight difference, but it suggests that larger churches may not always be at an advantage in helping members grow spiritually.

Those new to church

Where possible,¹ participants were split into two groups for further analysis. Those who did not regularly attend church before and those who did. The former group included anybody who had not regularly attended² in the last two years, in addition to those who had never attended.

29 percent of respondents have not been 'part of a church' in the 2-years before joining FXC.

61 percent were 'part of another church' in the two years prior to joining their FXC. 10 percent did not share information.

¹ 90 percent of respondents gave information on their prior attendance

47

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These groups were analysed further to observe key differences.

In summary, those who were not part of a church beforehand saw the most change. Usually, this was because they scored lower for the period before attending their FXC; for example, they were less likely to engage in spiritual disciplines like personal prayer.

At the time of taking the survey, the two groups' scores were more similar, and in 21 of the 87 survey questions – the two groups averaged the same. These included areas such as bible reading, overcoming difficult life issues, and feeling God's love.

Areas where those who were 'part of a church' before, still scored above new attendees included prayer, wanting to be challenged, some experiences with God and the impact of the church on their social lives. They were also more likely to feel safe to express doubts and more likely to understand how to integrate faith into their lives.

Areas where new church attendees scored above historic members included meeting regularly with other FXC members (including both discipling and being disciplined), being asked to serve, knowing the vision, being full of love and forgiveness toward others, giving money and, involvement in the local community (including helping with voluntary activities in the local community, telling friends and neighbours about the work of the FXC, and meeting up with members from the local community).

To conclude this mini-analysis, the average FXCs has 3 members out of every 10, who were not part of a church beforehand and these members feel that they are more involved in the life of the church – areas such as discipling, evangelism and serving the local community – than members who were previously part of a church.

This is a fascinating observation, but as these survey answers are all individual opinions of their own involvement (and not based on actual hours served or meetings attended), this conclusion should also be backed up by talking to FXC leaders about their experiences working alongside both groups.

Note again that respondents to this survey are also, on average, more keen and involved than non-respondents (both observed anecdotally in conversation with leaders, and statistically in the decrease in enthusiasm amongst the later respondents) which means that 3 in 10 is likely to be an underestimate as new and peripheral members of the church are less likely to have responded.

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Conclusions

6

If FXCs are going to be able to stand up to criticisms of being based "on a defective methodology",³ there needs to be a robust definition of success as well as a system to capture and evaluate their impact.

The Fruitfulness Framework has in many ways achieved this goal. As the first part of this report showed, through a literature review and practitioner focus groups, a clear set of measurable success outcomes have been created. Similarly, the Fruitfulness Framework is a tool that enables FXC leaders to measure their communities growth and change across these outcomes.

Initial results from this tool show that there is significant positive impact in the lives of FXC community members. This is true across the five main dimensions of the Fruitfulness Framework, as has been shown to occur in their relationship with God, with self, with their FXC community, with the FXC vision, and with their local context. Whilst this impact isn't entirely explained through the participation with the FXC, there is substantial evidence to suggest that FXCs are the main causal mechanism by which this positive impact is occurring.

Results also start to shed light on the keys to creating this impact. Here data suggests that the best action an FXC can take to enable members to experience personal change is to ask them to serve in a way which recognises their particular gifts and skills. Individuals who felt that their FXC did this were more than double as likely to see personal change as those who did not.

Finally, further research and use of the Fruitfulness Framework is recommended to continue to build upon these initial findings.

³ Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

This report was produced by Eido Research in partnership with The Church of England. Special thanks go to the community leaders and community members for their time in completing the online surveys.



If you would like to see the Church of England's commentary and information on the Fruitfulness Framework, [follow this link to visit the Church of England website](#), or scan the code shown to the left.

Eido specialises in helping Christian organisations to become impact, evidence, and learning focused. By this we mean organisations that have an ability to:

1. Clearly articulate a grounded faith-based impact strategy.
2. Research the needs of their beneficiaries, and measure their impact on their beneficiaries and society.
3. Prioritise quality evidence over anecdote when raising funds, making decisions, and learning to improve their impact in the future.

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APPENDIX B

FRUITFULNESS FRAMEWORK US FOCUS GROUP

This framework was used with a pilot sample of 19 FX communities that consist of 478 across the UK. The research questions consisted of; What does a Fruitful FX look like? To what extent are FX being fruitful? How can we improve their impact in the future? The purpose of asking these questions was to; provide leaders with a tool to measure and improve impact, celebrate the impact across the UK, and to identify fruitful FX for further learning and research. These questions and research were conducted primarily through focus groups and online questionnaires.

The Fruitfulness Framework was designed and anchored in the core features of an FX; Missional, Formational, Ecclesial, Contextual. These core features were divided into 5 different dimensions in the research; With God, With Self, With FX Members, With FX Vision, With Context. A comparative analysis was conducted measuring the fruit by directing the questions to the participant's responses before FX and currently. All US participants were white and age 25 and older. Of those participating in the survey 8.3% had never been a part of a church and another 8.3% had not been part of a church for two or more years.

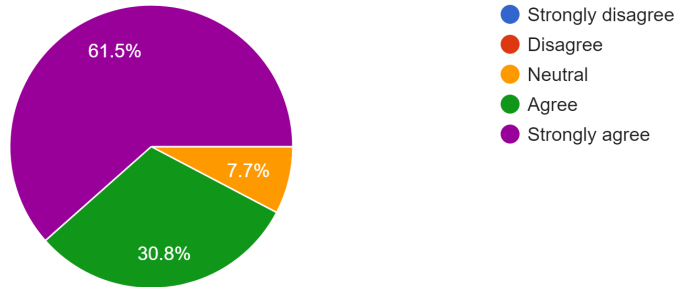
This questionnaire asks about five main 'relationships' in your life:

1. Relationship with God
2. Relationship with yourself
3. Relationship with other Community members
4. Relationship with Community vision
5. Relationship with local context

With God

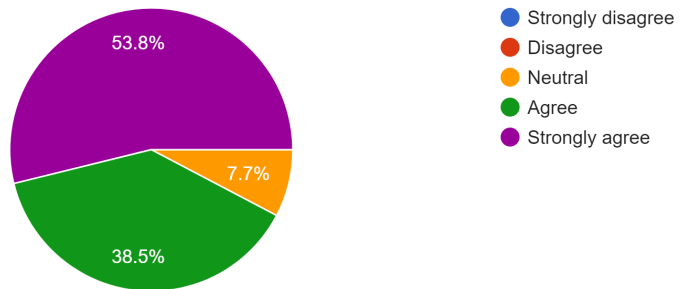
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to explore my faith in God; WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



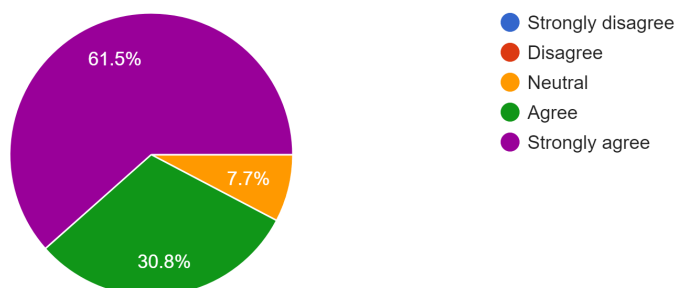
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to explore my faith in God; CURRENTLY

13 responses



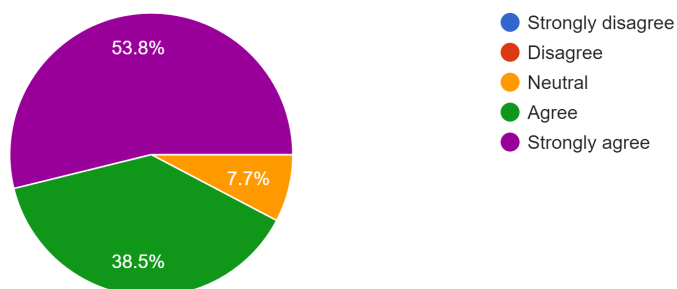
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to explore my faith in God; WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



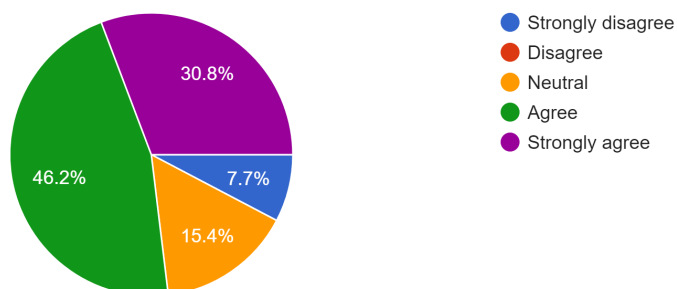
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to explore my faith in God; CURRENTLY

13 responses



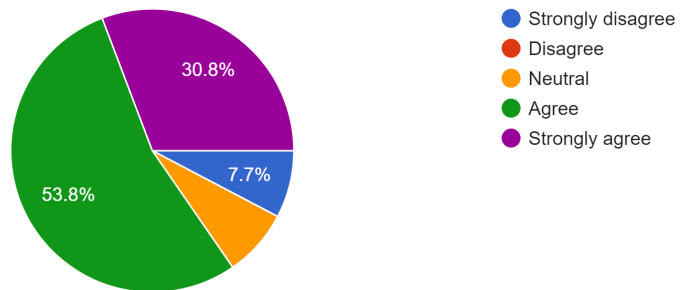
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to read my Bible; WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



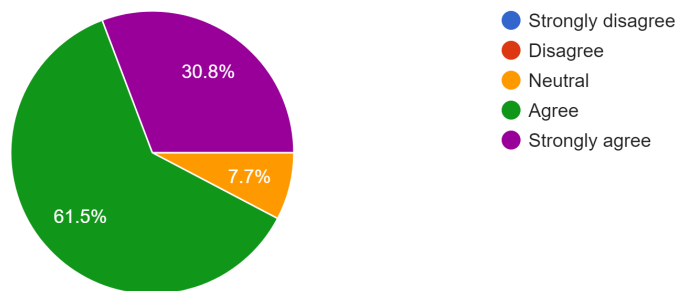
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to read my Bible;
CURRENTLY

13 responses



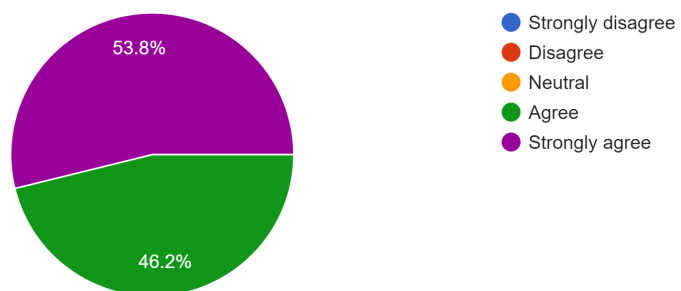
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I could see the difference that God has made in my life- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



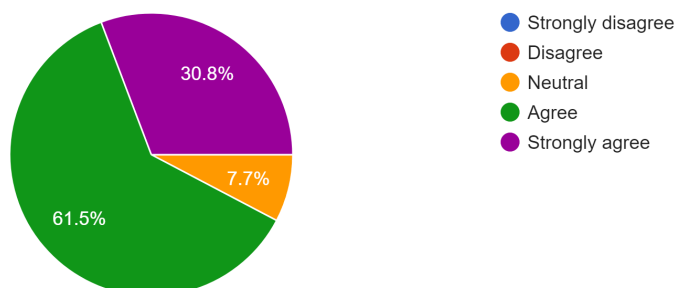
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I could see the difference that God has made in my life- CURRENTLY

13 responses



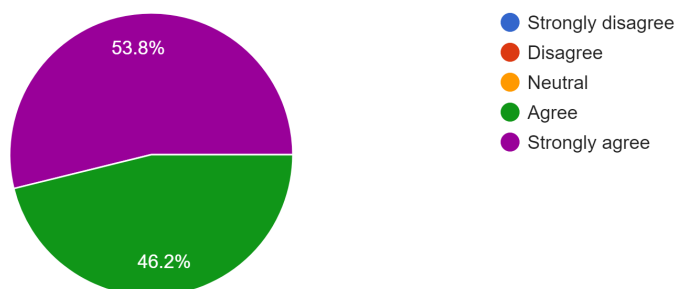
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt God's love-
WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



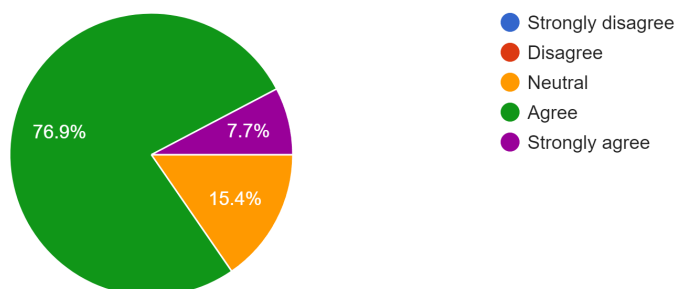
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt God's love-
CURRENTLY

13 responses



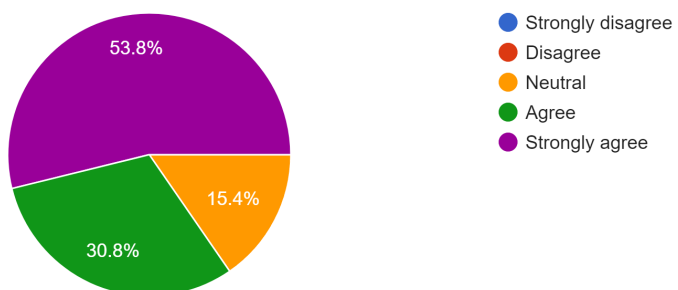
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt spiritually
alive- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



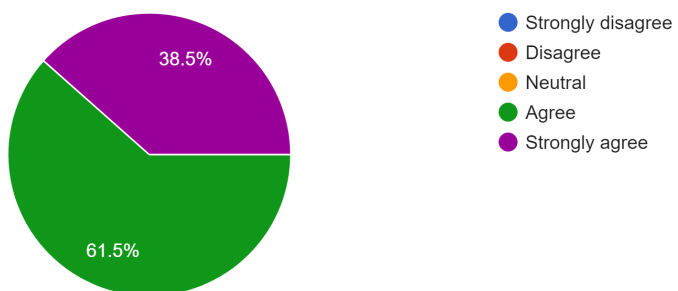
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt spiritually alive- CURRENTLY

13 responses



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted my relationship with God

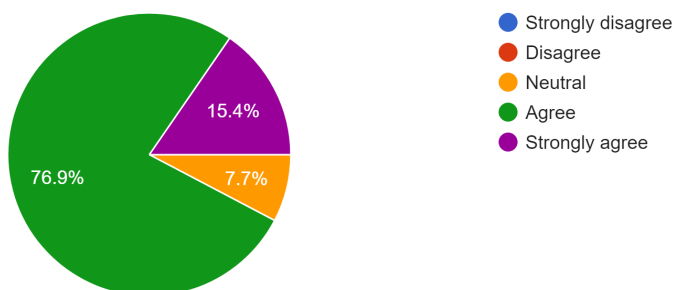
13 responses



With Yourself

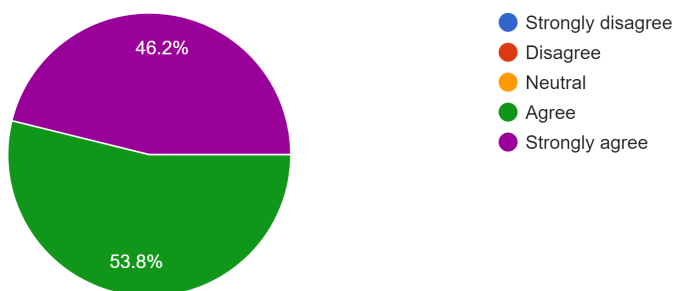
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to be open with others about who I really am-
13 responses

WHEN JOINED FX



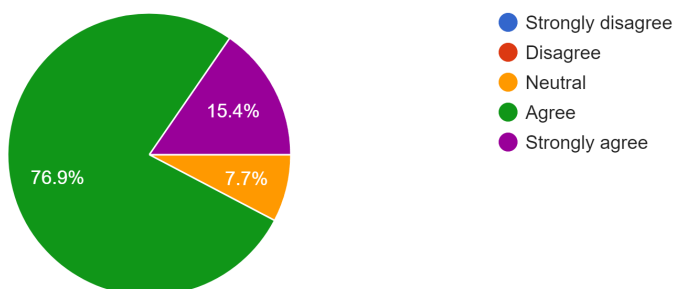
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I want to be open with others about who I really am-
13 responses

CURRENTLY



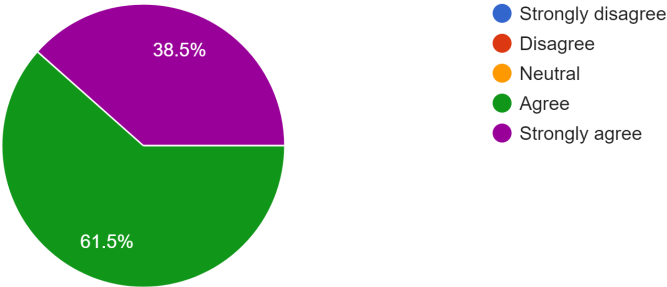
Please estimate how frequently you engage in the following behaviors: When they come up, I work to deal with the difficult issues in my life (problems at ...ddiction)-
13 responses

WHEN JOINED FX



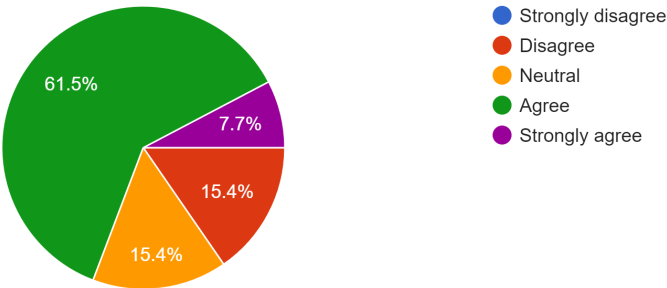
Please estimate how frequently you engage in the following behaviors: When they come up, I work to deal with the difficult issues in my life (problems at h...lth, addiction)- CURRENTLY

13 responses



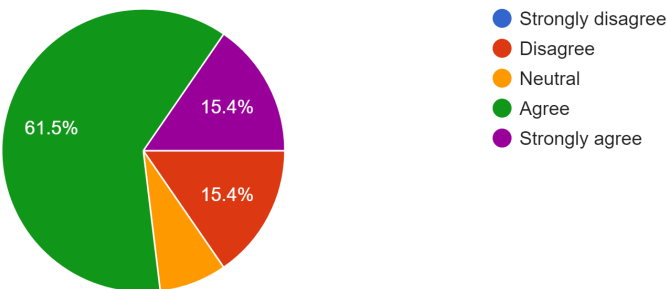
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt worthy- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



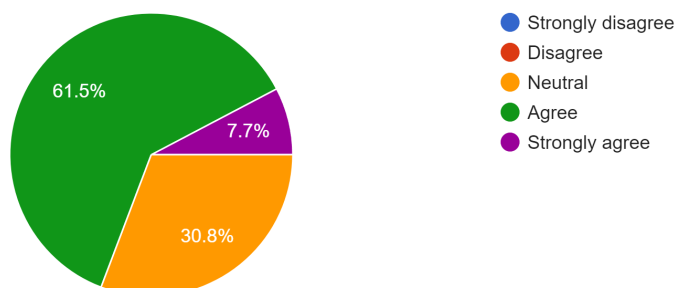
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt worthy- CURRENTLY

13 responses



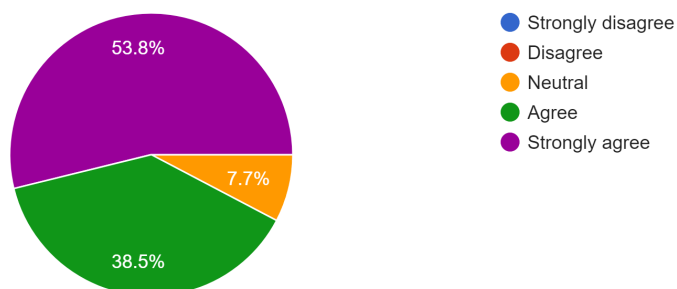
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt peaceful-
WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



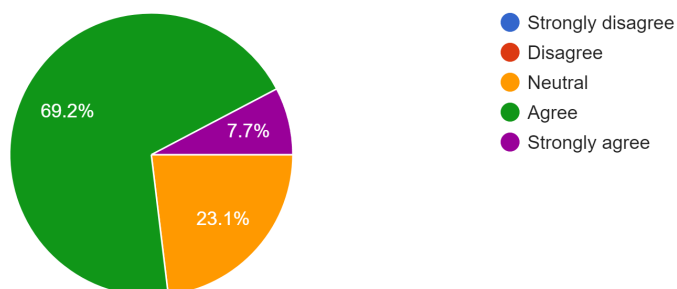
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt peaceful-
CURRENTLY

13 responses



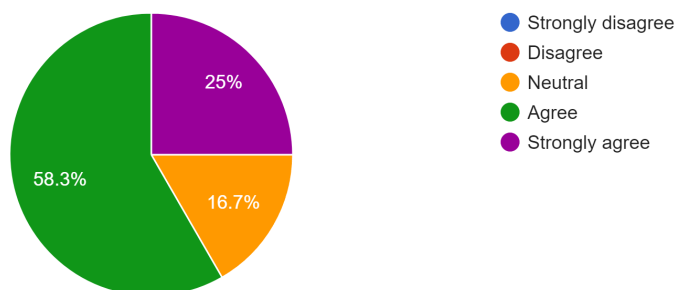
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: My behavior
was in line with my values- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



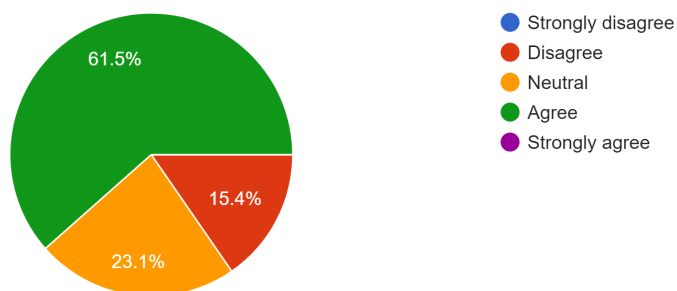
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: My behavior was in line with my values- CURRENTLY

12 responses



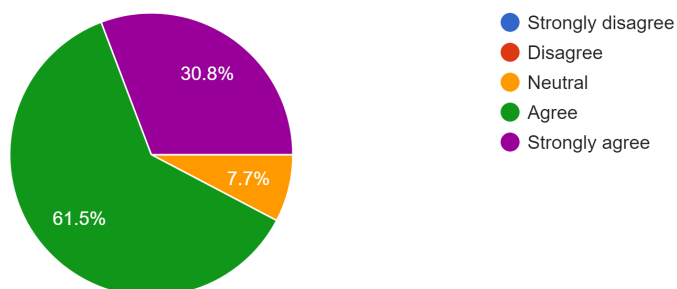
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community equips me for life's major challenges (e.g. parenting, relationships, sickness and death)-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



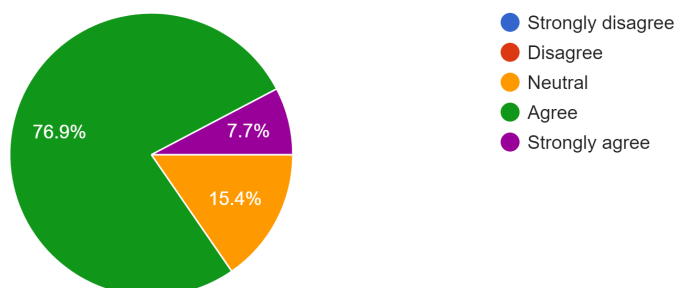
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community equips me for life's major challenges (e.g. parenting, relationships, sickness and death)-CURRENTLY

13 responses



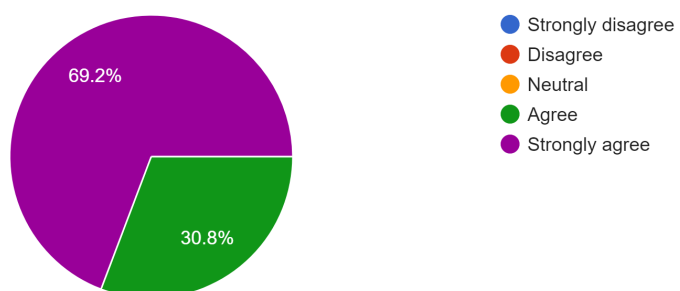
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted my personal life-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted my personal life-CURRENTLY

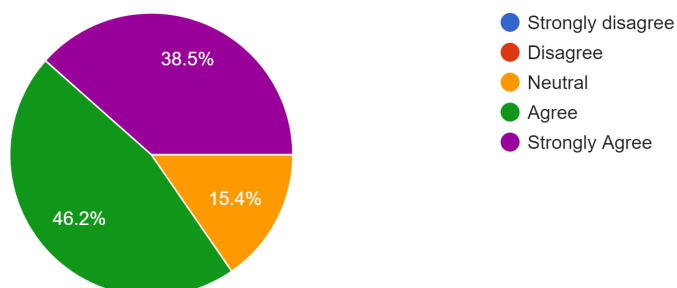
13 responses



With (FX) Community Members

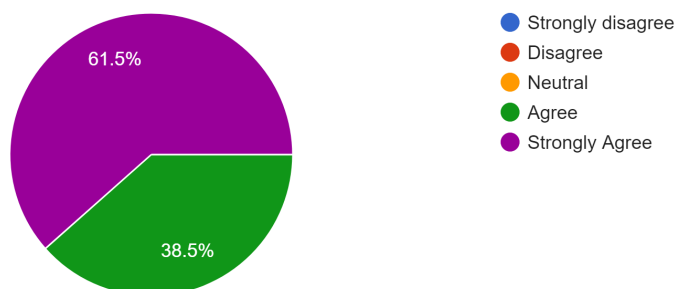
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want other people in My Community to grow and take part more-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



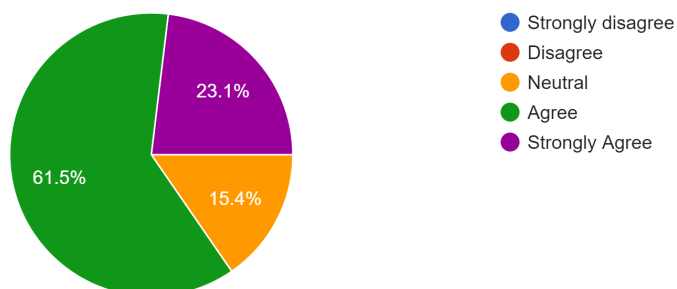
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want other people in My Community to grow and take part more-CURRENTLY

13 responses



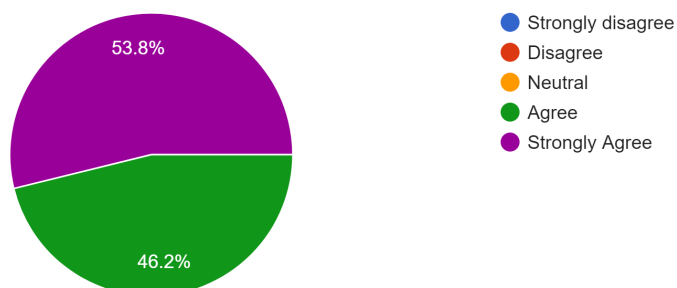
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



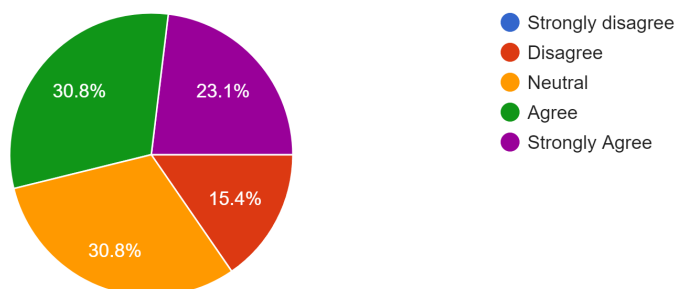
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong-CURRENTLY

13 responses



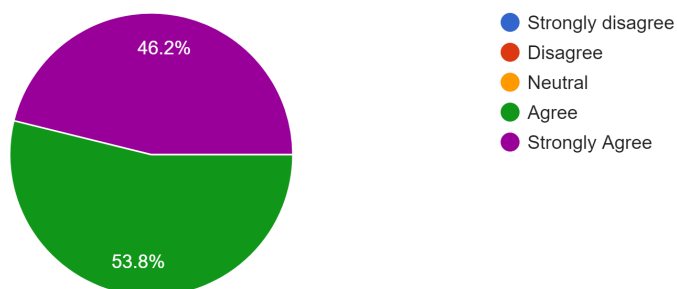
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: My Community is a safe place to have questions and doubts-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



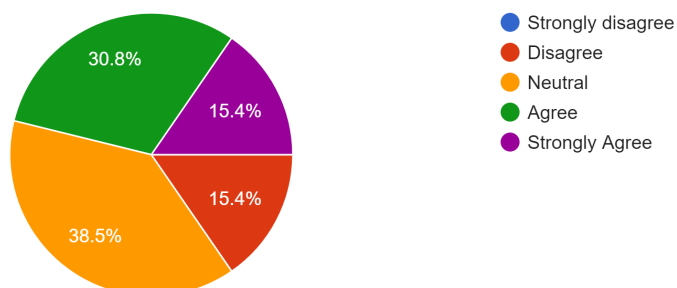
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: My Community is a safe place to have questions and doubts-CURRENTLY

13 responses



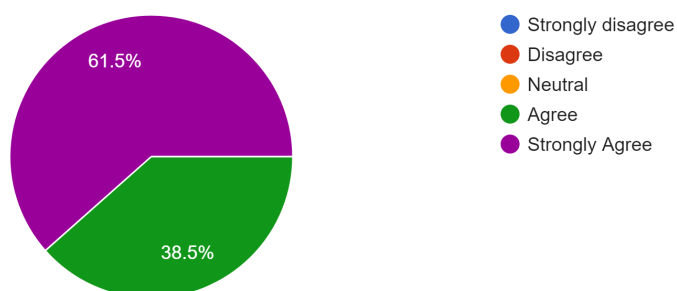
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Have a meaningful conversation with another member of My Community-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



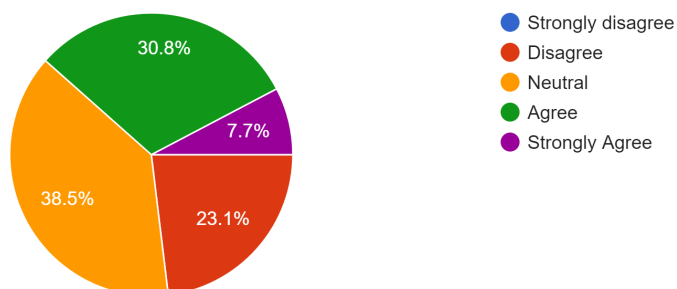
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Have a meaningful conversation with another member of My Community-CURRENTLY

13 responses



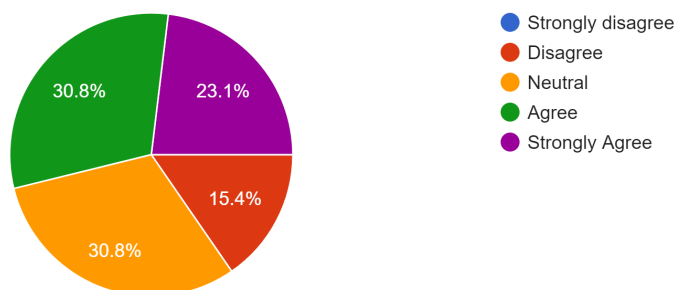
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Meet other members of My Community to intentionally help them grow in their lives and faith-WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



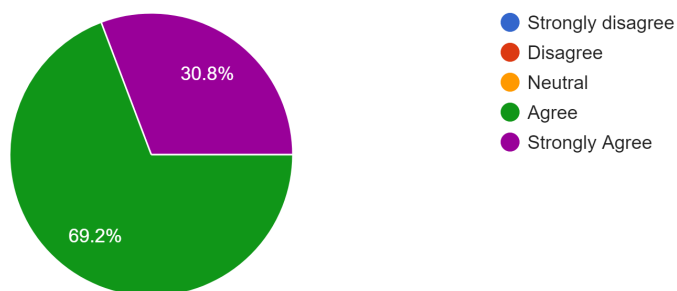
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Meet other members of My Community to intentionally help them grow in their lives and faith-CURRENTLY

13 responses



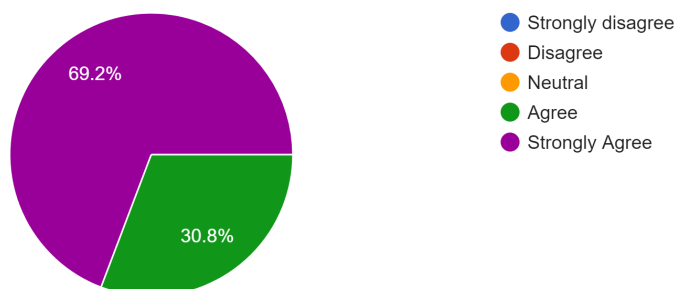
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt like helping others. WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



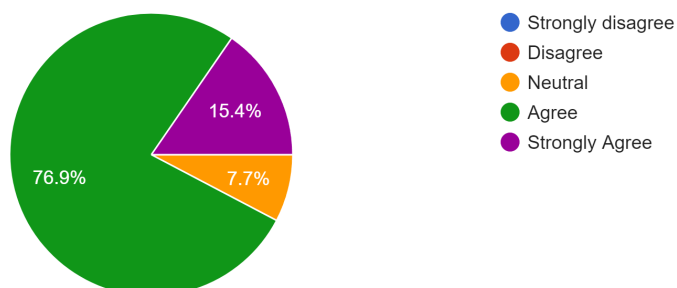
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt like helping others. CURRENTLY

13 responses



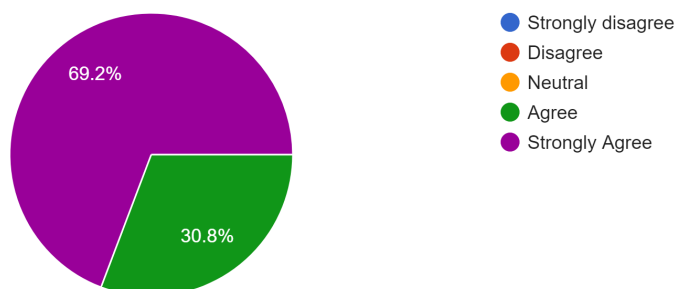
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I had feelings of love toward others.--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



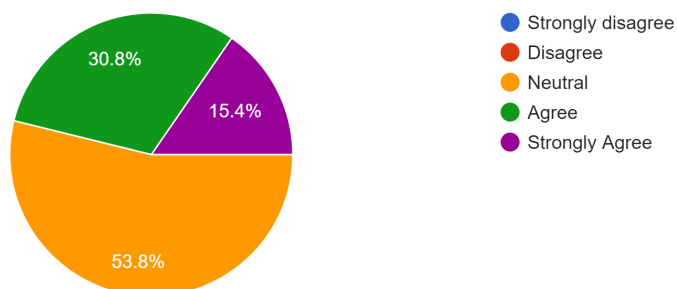
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I had feelings of love toward others.--CURRENTLY

13 responses



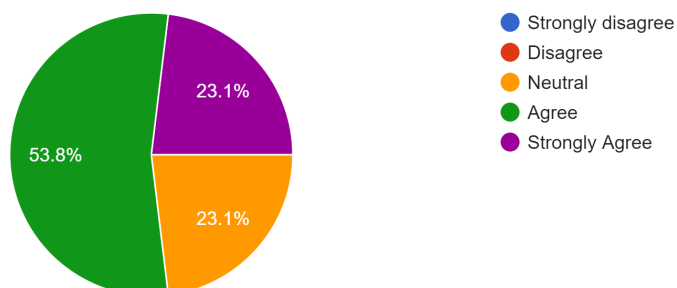
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt forgiveness toward others.--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



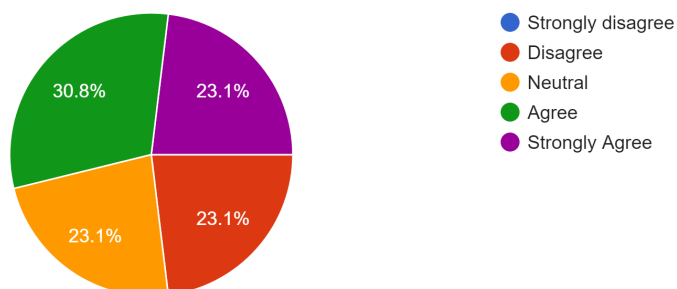
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt forgiveness toward others.--CURRENTLY

13 responses



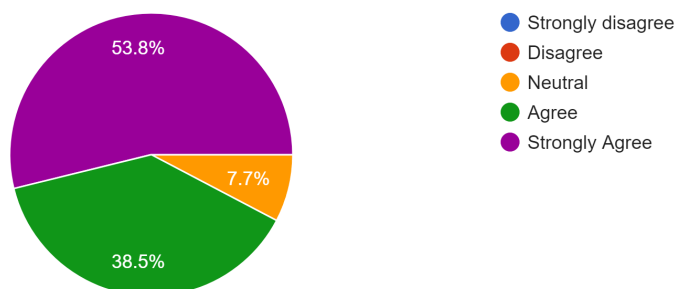
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I feel a sense of belonging with My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



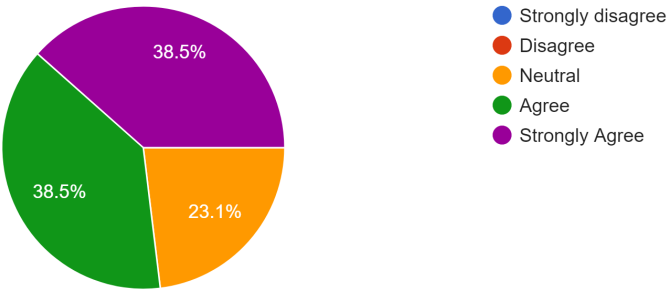
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I feel a sense of belonging with My Community--CURRENTLY

13 responses



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted my social life

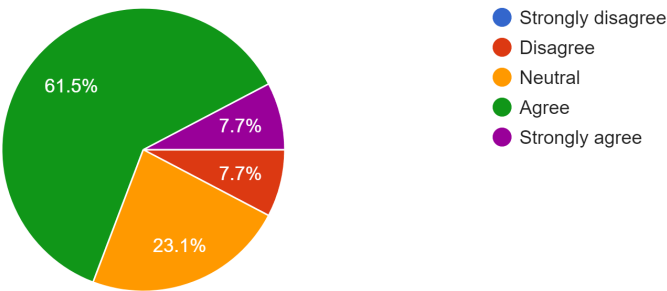
13 responses



With Community Vision

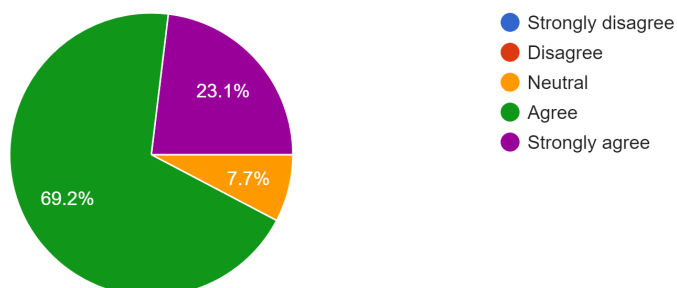
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I know the specific vision of My Community-- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



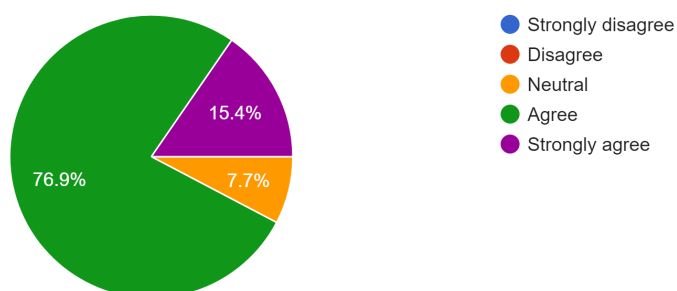
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I know the specific vision of My Community-- CURRENTLY

13 responses



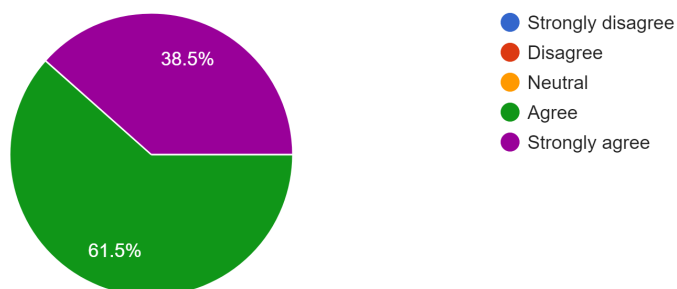
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I have something of value to contribute to My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



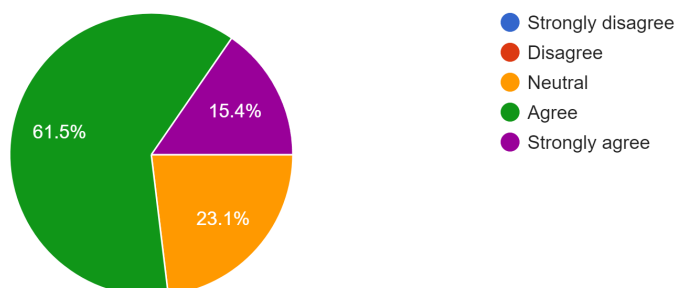
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I have something of value to contribute to My Community--CURRENTLY

13 responses



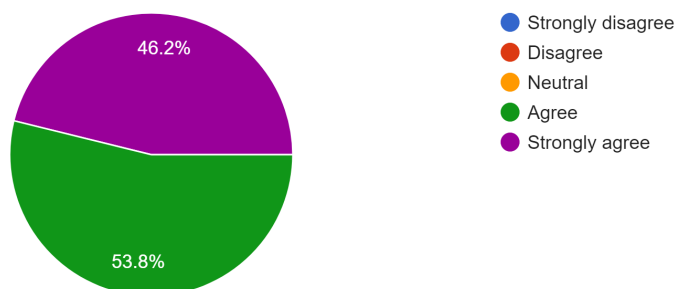
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want to try new things and take risks in My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



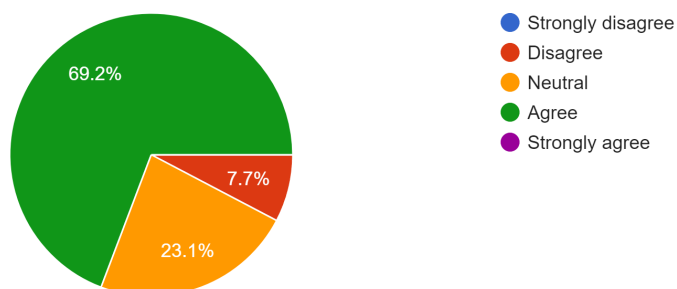
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want to try new things and take risks in My Community--CURRENTLY

13 responses

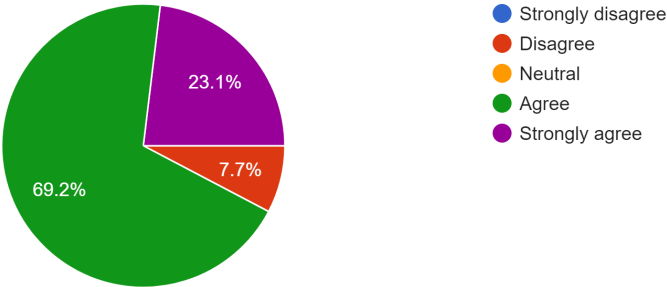


Engagement in the the following behaviors: Give money to My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

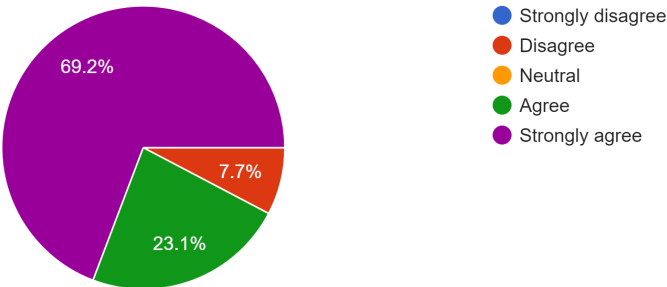
13 responses



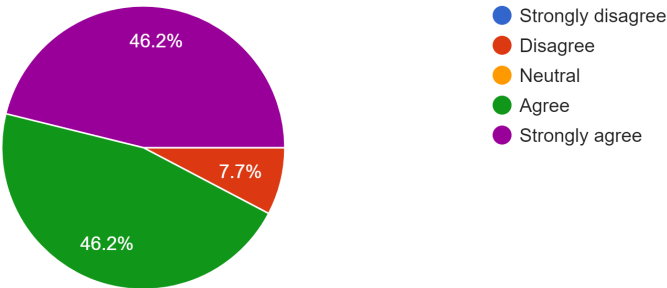
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Give money to My Community--CURRENTLY
13 responses



Engagement in the the following behaviors: Attend church worship, either physically or online--WHEN JOINED FX
13 responses

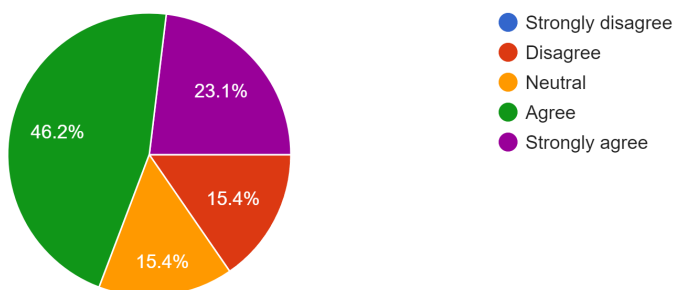


Engagement in the the following behaviors: Attend church worship, either physically or online--CURRENTLY
13 responses



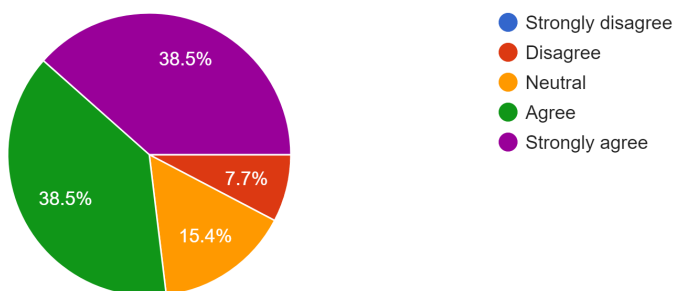
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Take part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in My Community-- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



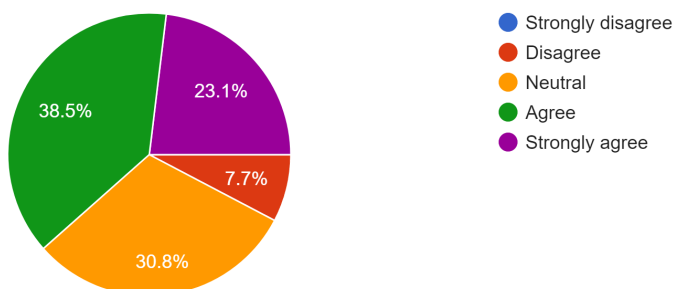
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Take part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in My Community-- CURRENTLY

13 responses



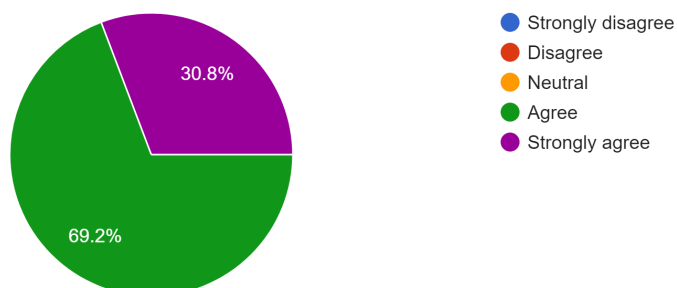
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt I have a purpose in My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



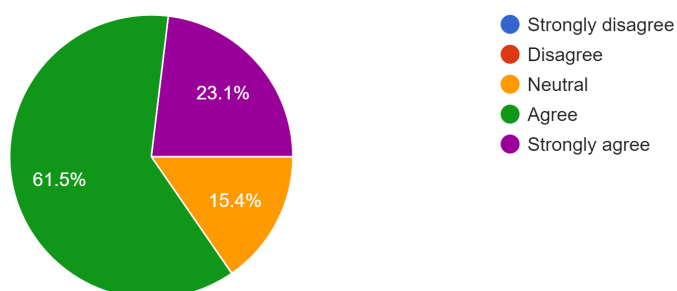
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I felt I have a purpose in My Community--CURRENTLY

13 responses



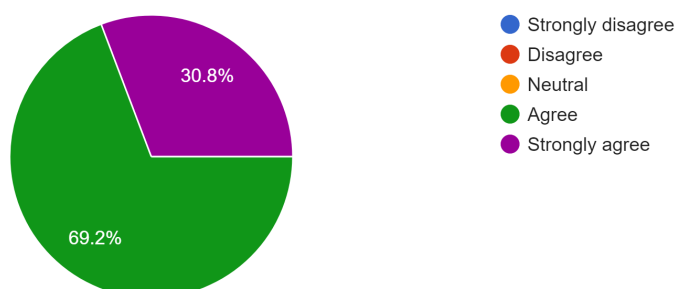
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I wanted to make the world a better place.--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



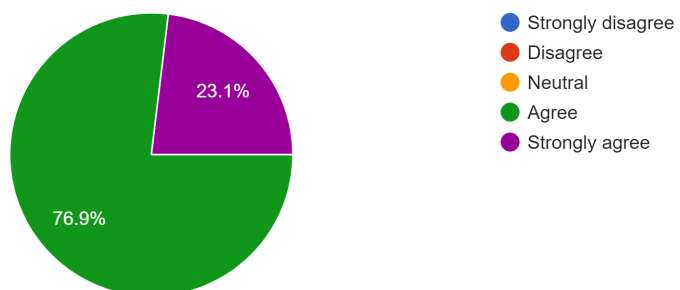
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I wanted to make the world a better place.--CURRENTLY

13 responses



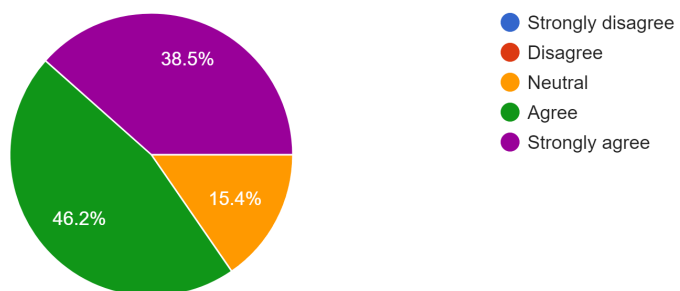
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted my vision of church

13 responses



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community asks me to serve in a way which recognizes my particular gifts and skills

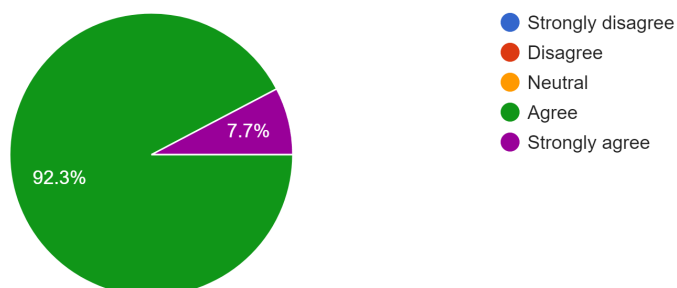
13 responses



With Local Context

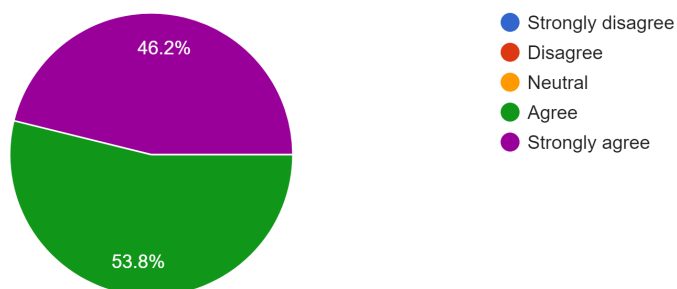
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: My Community wants to make a positive difference in our local context / local community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



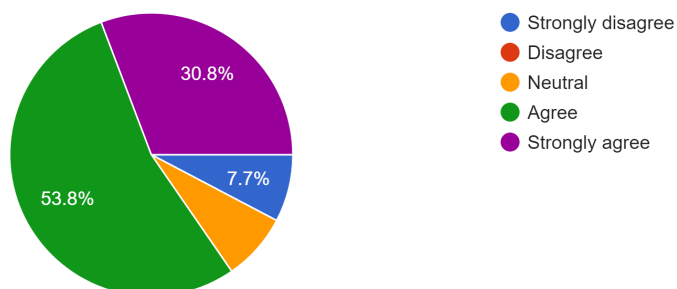
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: My Community wants to make a positive difference in our local context / local community--CURRENTLY

13 responses



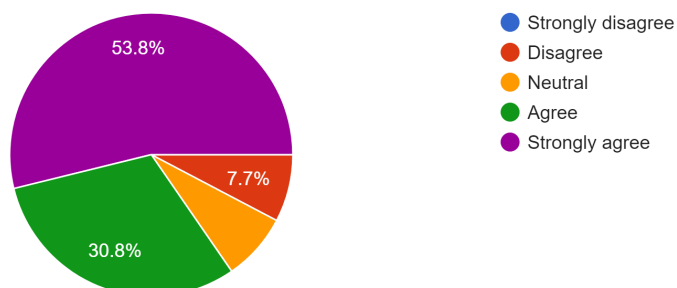
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



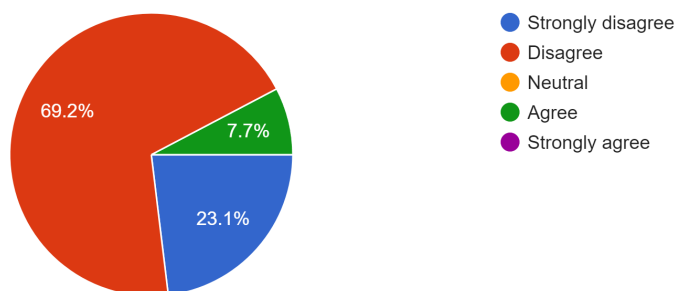
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life--CURRENTLY

13 responses



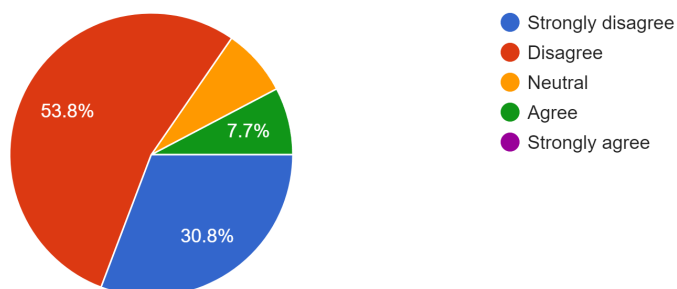
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I'm not sure how my faith connects with everyday life--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



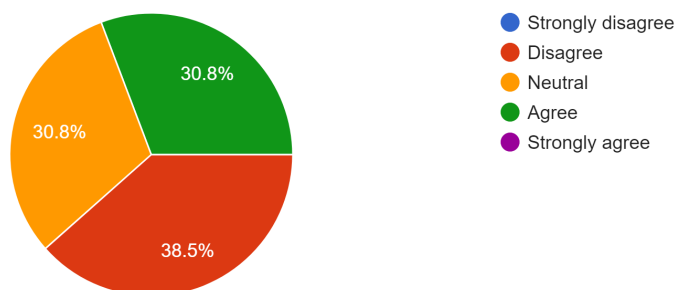
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I'm not sure how my faith connects with everyday life--CURRENTLY

13 responses



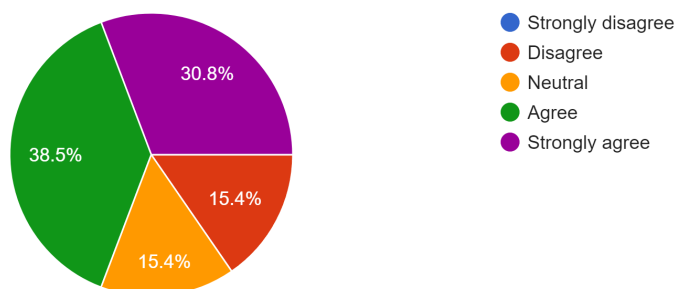
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Meeting up with people from the local community (other than Community members)--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



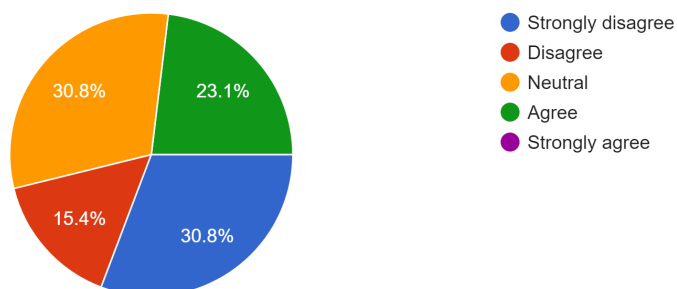
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Meeting up with people from the local community (other than Community members)--CURRENTLY

13 responses

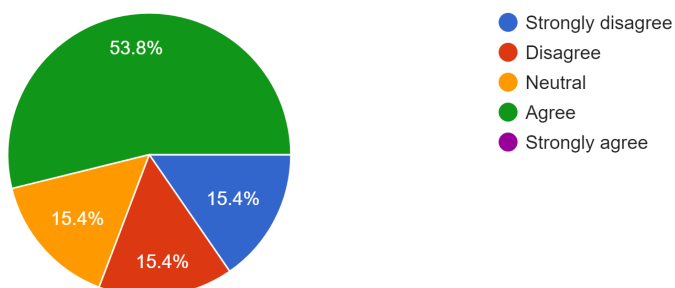


Engagement in the the following behaviors: Participate or find out about current local community issues and needs (e.g. read community newsletter...munity 'town hall' discussions)--WHEN JOINED FX

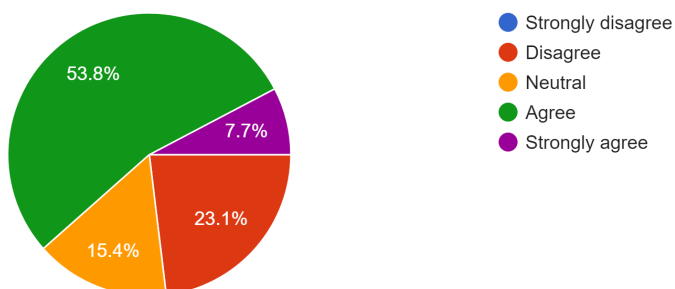
13 responses



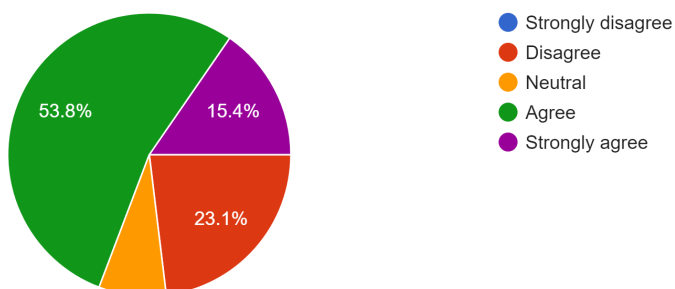
Engagement in the the following behaviors: Participate or find out about current local community issues and needs (e.g. read community newsletter...d community 'town hall' discussions)--CURRENTLY
13 responses



Engagement in the the following behaviors: Volunteer in a local community project (e.g. food bank)--WHEN JOINED FX
13 responses

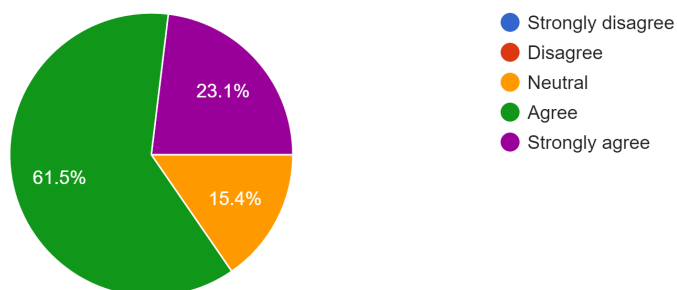


Engagement in the the following behaviors: Volunteer in a local community project (e.g. food bank)--CURRENTLY
13 responses



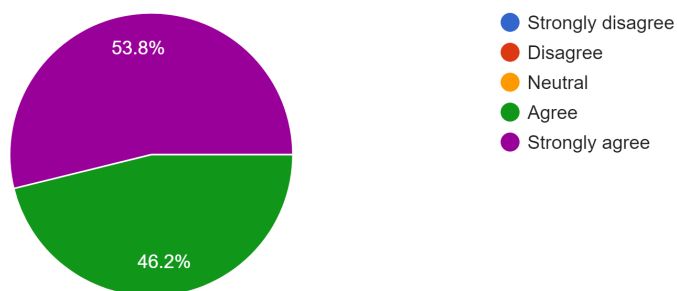
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: When members from the local community attend our Community they are made to feel welcome--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



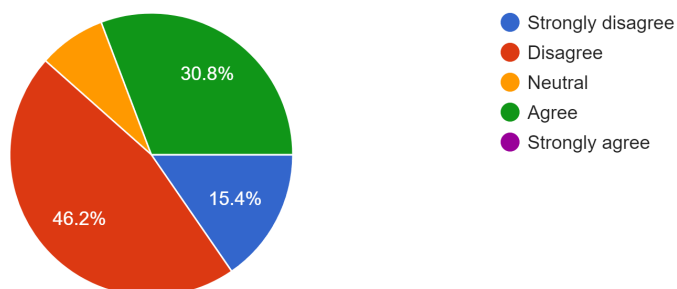
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: When members from the local community attend our Community they are made to feel welcome--CURRENTLY

13 responses



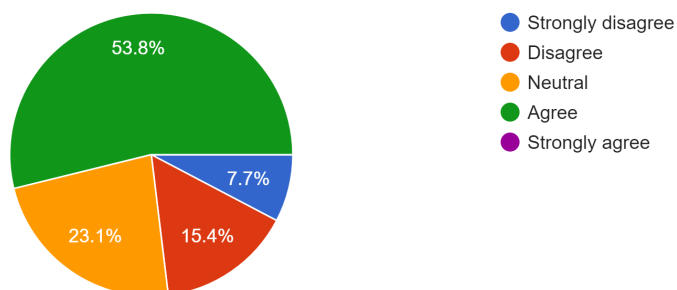
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: If asked, my neighbors know about our Community and its activities.-- WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



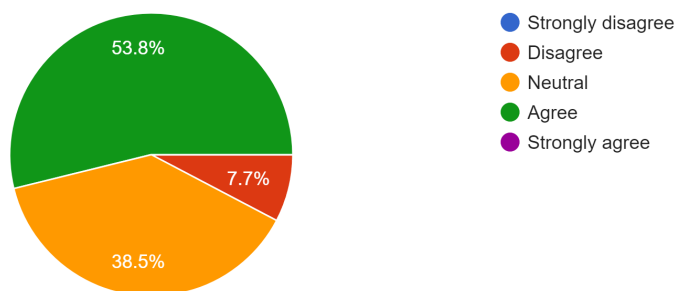
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: If asked, my neighbors know about our Community and its activities.-- CURRENTLY

13 responses



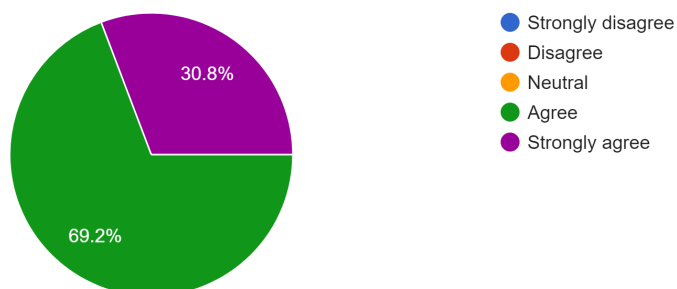
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: Together in our Community we are getting to know what people i...l community hope for and need.--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



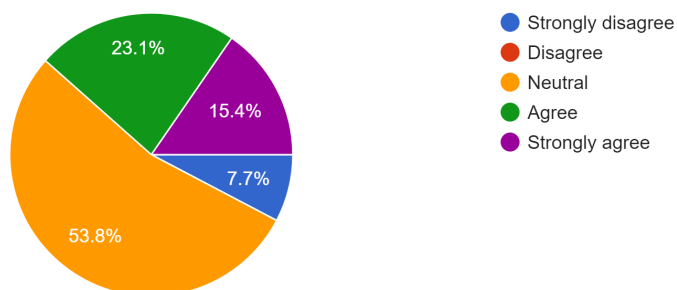
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: Together in our Community we are getting to know what people in... local community hope for and need.-- CURRENTLY

13 responses



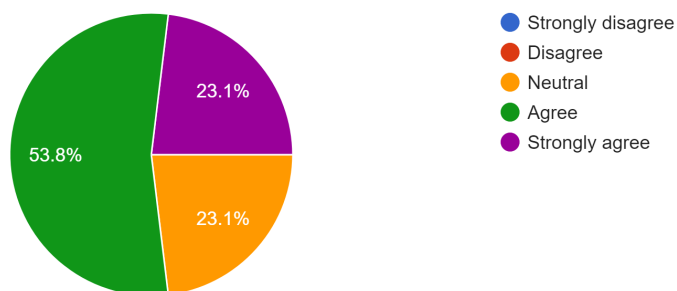
Please estimate how frequently you experience the following over a typical month: I can think of an examples of when the local community has actively supported My Community--WHEN JOINED FX

13 responses



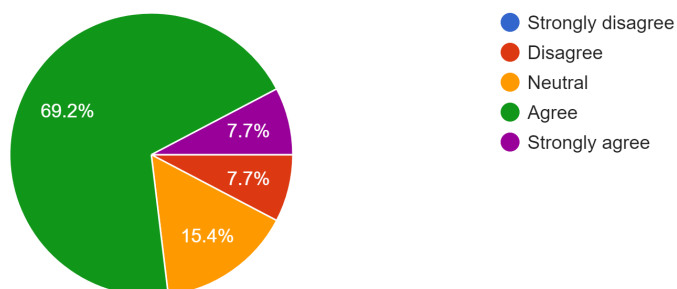
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13 responses



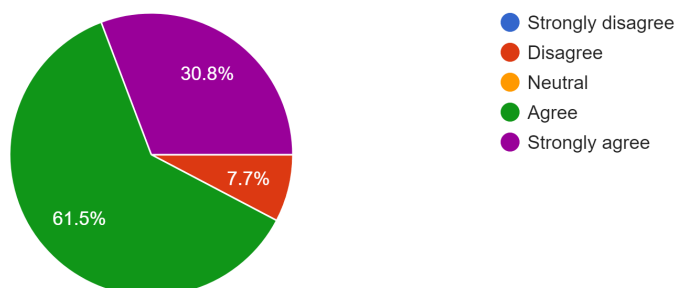
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles (e.g. workplace or community groups)

13 responses



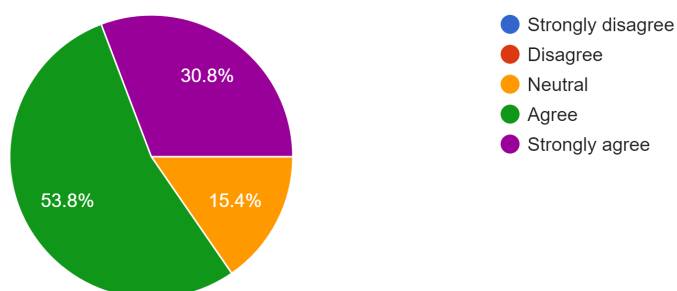
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles (e.g. workplace or community groups)

13 responses



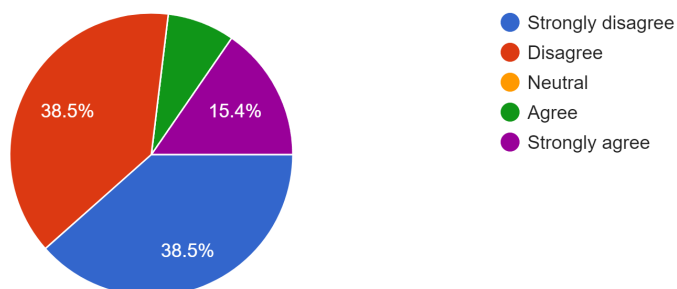
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community has positively impacted how I engage with the local community

13 responses



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: My Community is not a place where occasional visitors are made welcome

13 responses



Which of these best describes your situation before joining The Community?

12 responses



APPENDIX C

PRE/POST WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre/Post Questionnaire

1. In your own words define disciple.
2. In order to be a disciple, do you have to make disciples? Why or why not?
3. What practices and postures are important in the life of a disciple?
4. What are the major roadblocks to effective discipleship?
5. Rank in order of importance the following practices in the life of a disciple with 1 being most important and 5 being least important:

_____ a. daily prayer

_____ b. loving and serving marginalized people

_____ c. faith sharing

_____ d. generosity

_____ e. reading the Bible

Why did you choose these rankings?
6. What is the greatest challenge to the existing church in forming effective disciples?
7. In your own words define church.
8. In your own words describe a fruitful disciple.

APPENDIX D
PRACTICES INFOGRAPHIC

Catalyzing Effective Discipleship-Practice/Weekly Application



- 1 **Prayer-walk your neighborhood,** favorite shopping center, or hangout, one or more times this week. Listen for invitations from God.

Share John 21:1-14
in your own words with someone.

2



- 3 **Draw a map and include all of the** places you frequent on a daily/weekly/monthly basis on it. Pray through the map in your daily prayer this week. Listen for God's invitations.

Love and serve a marginalized person or group this week. Alternatively, host a neighborhood party, and invite everyone to bring something.

4



- 5 **Have a conversation** with someone you encounter regularly on your map about what God has done in your life lately. Ask them to share where they are experiencing or not experiencing God.

Design your own Fresh Expression

Who are the people? Where and when might they gather? What does it look like to love and build community together? What might discipleship look like with this group?

6



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